





GREEN PASTURES AND PICCADILLY.



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Edmund Smith
GREEN PASTURES

AND

PICCADILLY.

BY

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"A PRINCESS OF THULE," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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GREEN PASTURES AND PICCADILLY.

CHAPTER I.

THE SOLITUDES OF SURREY.

PARLIAMENT was not dissolved that autumn, and there was no need that Englebury and its twin electors, Mr. and Mrs. Chorley, should interfere with the happiness of Mr. and Lady Sylvia Balfour. Both the young people, indeed, would have scouted the notion that any fifteen dozen of Chorleys could have possessed that power. Surely it was possible for them to construct a sufficiently pleasant *modus vivendi*, even if they held somewhat different views about political matters.

But long before the crisis of a General Election occurred, Hugh Balfour had managed to think out very seriously several questions regarding the

relations between himself and his young wife. He was determined that he would be largely generous and considerate to her. When he saw how tenderly devoted to him she was, when he got to know more of those clear perceptions of duty, and obedience, and unhesitating unselfishness that governed her conduct, when he saw how that sweetness and strange sincerity of manner of hers charmed every one who was introduced to her, surely he had every reason to be generously considerate. It is true that he had dreamed some sentimental dream of a helpmeet who would be constantly at his side in the rough work of the world ; but was not that his own folly ? It was a pretty notion, doubtless, but look at the actual facts. Was it desirable that this tenderly-nurtured, sensitive girl should plunge into the animosities and anxieties of political life ? Her first slight acquaintance, for example, with the ways of a borough election had only shocked and pained her ; nay, more, it had very nearly produced a quarrel between him and her. This kind of risk was quite unnecessary. He laughed at the notion of her being an enthusiast for or against

the Birmingham League. How could she be deeply interested in the removal of Shrewsbury School, or in Lord Kimberley's relations with the Pacific Railway, or in the expedition of the Dutch against Acheen? Would he gain any more knowledge of the working of the London vestries, supposing he dragged her dainty little feet through the hideous slums of the great city? At this moment he was going off for a riding excursion, after the manner of Cobbett, through Somersetshire. He wanted to find out for himself—for this man was no great enthusiast in politics, but had, on the other hand, a patient desire to satisfy himself as to facts—what were the actual conditions and aspirations of agricultural life there, and he wanted to find out, too, what would be the chances of a scheme of sanitary reform for the rural districts. Now of what possible good could Lady Sylvia be in inspecting piggeries? The thing was absurd. No, no. Her place was in the roomy phaeton he had brought down from town for her, behind the two beautiful black horses which she drove with admirable nerve and skill. She formed part of a pretty picture as we

used to see her in these moist and blustering November days. Black clouds behind the yellow elms; the gusty south wind whirling the ruddy leaves from the branches; a wild glare of light shining along the wet road until it gleamed like a canal of brilliant silver; and in the midst of this dazzling radiance the small figure perched high on the phaeton, clad all in furs, a scarlet feather in her hat, and the sweetest of smiles for known passers-by on the fresh young face. Was it any wonder that he left her to her familiar Surrey lanes, and to the amusement of ordering her small household of The Lilacs, and to the snugness of her father's library in the evening, he going off by himself to that humdrum business of prying about Somersetshire villages?

He was away for about ten days in Somersetshire. Then he wrote to her that he would return to London by way of Englebury; and she was not to expect him very soon, for he might be detained in London by a lot of business. It would not be worth her while to come up. His time would be fully occupied; and she was much

better down in Surrey, enjoying the fresh air and exercise of the country.

He had not the slightest doubt that she was enjoying herself. Since her marriage she had not at all lived the secluded life she had led at the Hall. Many a night there were more carriages rolling along the dark and muddy lanes towards The Lilacs than had driven up to the Hall in the previous month. Balfour was the most hospitable of men, now that he had some one to take direction of his dinner-parties; and as these parties were necessarily and delightfully small, there was nothing for it but to have plenty of them. The neighbours were convinced there never had been a more fortunate match. Happiness shone on the face of the young house-mistress as she sat at the top of the table which had been florally decorated with her own hands. Her husband was quite openly proud of her—he took not the slightest pains to conceal the fact, as most young husbands laboriously and ineffectually do. And then the wonderful way in which he professed to be interested about those local matters which form—alas!—the staple of talk at rural dinner-parties.

You would have thought he had no care for anything beyond horses, dogs, and pheasants. He was grieved to hear that the parson's wife would not countenance the next charity concert; but he was quite sure that Lady Sylvia would win her over. He hoped it was not true that old Somebody or other was to be sold out of Something Farm, after having occupied it for forty years; but feared it was too true that he had taken to drink. And one night, when he heard that a neighbouring master of harriers had intimated that he would cease to hunt if he were not guaranteed a sum of £2000 a year, Balfour declared that he would make up whatever deficit the subscription might show. He became popular in our neighbourhood. He never talked about politics; but gave good dinners instead.

Indeed, there were one or two of us who could not quite reconcile Mr. Balfour's previous history with his present conduct. You would have thought, to hear him speak, that his highest notion of human happiness was shooting rabbits on Willowby Heath, although, as every one knew, he was a very indifferent shot. Then the fashion

in which he drove round with his wife, paying afternoon calls! Gentlemen who pay afternoon calls are ordinarily more amiable than busy; and how this man, with all his eager ambitions and activities, could dawdle away the afternoon in a few dull drawing-rooms in the country, was a strange thing to some of us. Was he so proud of this young wife of his that he was never tired of showing her off? Or was it—seeing that by-and-by he would be away in the hurry and worry of an election, and perhaps locked-up for six months in the close atmosphere of the House of Commons—was it that he wished Lady Sylvia to have as many friends as possible down in these rural solitudes, so as to lighten the time for her?

At all events, she seemed to enjoy her married life sufficiently well. This neighbourhood had always been her home. She was within easy driving or riding distance of the Hall, and could see that things were going straight there. She had many friends. When her husband left her for a week or two to her own devices, he had no doubt at all but that her time would be fully

occupied, and that her life was passing as pleasantly as could be desired.

When Lady Sylvia got that letter, saying he would return from Somersetshire by way of Englebury, and would remain a few days in London, she was sitting at one of the French windows of The Lilacs, looking out on a dismal December afternoon, the rain slowly drizzling down on the laurels and the wet gravel paths. She took it from the servant, and opened it with much composure. She had been schooling herself for some time back.

She read the letter through with great calmness, and folded it again, and put it in her pocket. Then she thought she would go and get some needlework, for it was melancholy business this staring out at the rain. But as she rose to pass through the room, the sensitive lips began to tremble strangely ; and suddenly, with a passionate abandonment of despair and grief, she threw herself on a couch, and hid her face in the cushion, and burst into a long and bitter fit of crying. The proud, hurt soul could no longer contain itself. It was in vain that she had been training

herself to play the part which he had seemingly allotted her. She saw her husband being removed further and further from her ; his interests and occupations and hopes were becoming more and more a matter personal to himself ; their lives were divided, and the barrier was daily growing more hopelessly obvious and impassable. Was this, then, the end of those beautiful dreams of what marriage was to make their future life together ? Was she already a widow, and forsaken ?

Then this wild fit of despair and grief took another turn, and her heart grew hot with anger against those things that had come between her husband and herself. Once or twice, in her courtship days, she had entertained a passing feeling of resentment against the House of Commons, for that it took away from her so much of her husband's thoughts ; but now a more vehement jealousy possessed her, and she regarded the whole business of public life as a conspiracy against domestic happiness. The Chorleys ? No, not the Chorleys. These people were too contemptible to come between her husband and herself. But they were a part, and an ugly representative part, of that

vulgarizing, distracting, hateful political life, which was nevertheless capable of drawing a man away from his wife and home, and filling his mind with gross cares and mean ambitions. The poor, spoilt, hurt child felt in her burning heart that the British Constitution had cruelly wronged her. She regarded with a bitter anger and jealousy the whole scheme of representative government. Was it not those electioneering people, and the stupid labourers of Somersetshire, and the wretched newspapers that were writing about dozens of subjects they did not understand, who had robbed her of her husband?

A servant tapped at the door. She jumped up, and stood there calm and dignified, her back to the window, so that her face was scarcely visible in the shadow. The man only wanted to put some coals on the fire. After he was gone Lady Sylvia dried her eyes, sat down once more at the window and began to consider—her lips a trifle more firmly put together than usual.

After all, there was a good deal of womanly judgment and decision about this girl in spite of all the fanciful notions and excess of sensitiveness

that had sprung from her solitary musings. Was it seemly that she should fret like a child over her own unhappiness? Her first duty was her duty as a wife. If her husband believed it to be better that he should fight his public life alone, she would do her best in the sphere to which she had been relegated, and make his home as pleasant for him as she could. Crying, because her husband went off by himself to Englebury? She grew ashamed of herself. She began to accuse herself, with some indignation. She was ready to say to herself that she was not fit to be anybody's wife.

Full of a new and eager virtue, she hastily rang the bell. The man did not fall down in a fit when she said she wanted the phaeton sent round as soon as possible, but he gently reminded her ladyship that it was raining, and perhaps the brougham—— But no; her ladyship would have the phaeton; and at once. Then she went upstairs to get dressed; and her maid produced all sorts of waterproofs.

Why so much haste? Why the eager delight of her face? As she drove briskly along the wet lanes the rain-drops were running down her

checks, but she looked as happy and comfortable as if it had been a breezy day in June. The horses splashed the mud about; the wheels swished through the pools; in the noise how could the man behind her hear his young mistress gaily humming to herself

*Should he upbraid
I'll own that he'll prevail !*

He thought she had gone mad to go out on a day like this; and no doubt made some remarks to himself when he had to jump down into the mud to open a certain iron gate.

Now there was in this neighbourhood a lady who had for many a day been on more or less friendly terms with Lady Sylvia, but who seemed to become even more intimate with her after her marriage. The fact is, Mr. Balfour appeared to take a great liking to this person; and was continually having his wife and her brought together. Those who know her well are familiar with her tricks of manner and thinking—her worship of Bishops, her scorn of husbands in general, and her demeanour of awful dignity, which has gained for her the style and title of Our Most Sovereign

Lady Five-foot-three; but there is no denying the fact that there is about her eyes a certain pathetic, affectedly-innocent look that has an odd power over those who do not know her well, and that invites those people to an instant friendliness and confidence. Well, this was the person whom Lady Sylvia now wished to see; and after she had taken off her wet waterproofs in the hall, and dried her face, she went straight into the drawing-room, and in a minute or two was joined by her friend.

“My dear Lady Sylvia,” cried her Most Gracious Majesty, kissing the young thing with maternal fondness; “what could have brought you out on such a day? and in the phaeton, too?”

Lady Sylvia’s cheeks were quite rosy after the rain. Her eyes were bright and glad. She said blithely—

“I came out for the fun of it. And to beg you to give me a cup of tea. And to have a long chat with you.”

Surely these were sufficient reasons. At least they satisfied the elder woman; who rang for the tea, and got it, and then assumed a wise and

confidential air, in order to hear the confessions of this gushing young creature. Had she formed some awful project of going up to London on a shopping excursion in the absence of her husband; or had the incorrigible Blake been grumbling as usual, and threatening to leave?

Nothing of the kind. It was the elder woman who was to be lectured and admonished—on the duty of wives, on the right of husbands to great consideration, and so forth, and so forth. Of course the lecture was introduced by a few playful and preliminary bits of gossip, so as to remove from the mind of the listener the notion that it had been premeditated; nevertheless, Lady Sylvia seemed to be very earnest on this matter. After all, said she, it was the lot of women to suffer. Those who seemed to be most fortunately placed in the world had doubtless their secret cares; there was nothing for it but to bear them with a brave heart. A wife could not lessen the anxieties of her husband by sharing them; she would more probably increase them by her womanly fear and exaggeration. It was not to be expected that a woman should be constantly intermeddling in

affairs of which she could not possibly be a fair judge. A great many wives thought they were neglected, when it was only their excessive vanity that was wounded: that was foolish on the part of those wives. *U.s.w.* Lady Sylvia talked bravely and gladly. She was preaching a new gospel; she had the eagerness of a convert.

Her listener, who, notwithstanding that sham dignity of hers, has a great deal of womanly tact and tenderness, merely listened and smilingly agreed. But when Lady Sylvia, after refusing repeated entreaties that she should stay to dinner, drove away in the dusk and the rain to her solitary home, it was observed that her friend was unusually thoughtful. She scarcely said anything at all during dinner; although once, after an interval of profound silence, she startled us all by asking abruptly—

“Why does not Mr. Balfour take Lady Sylvia up to his house in Piccadilly?”

CHAPTER II.

THE CANDIDATE.

ON that same afternoon Mr. Hugh Balfour was also out driving—in a dog-cart ; and his companion was Mr. Bolitho, whom he had picked up at an out-of-the-way station, and was conducting to Englebury. It was a dismal drive. There was not the rain here that there was in Surrey ; but in its place there was a raw, damp, grey mist, that hung about the woods and fields, and dripped from the withered briars in the hedges, and covered the thick top-coats of the two men with a fur of wet. Neither cigar nor pipe would keep alight in this cold drizzle ; Balfour's left hand, the fingers closed on the spongy reins, was thoroughly benumbed. Even the bland and cheerful Billy Bolitho had no more jokes left.

“I suppose,” said Balfour at last, amid the

clatter of the cob's hoofs on the muddy road, "I suppose we might as well go up and see the Chorleys this evening?"

"I would rather say the morning," answered Mr. Bolitho, looking mournfully out from between the points of his coat-collar at the black stump of his cigar. "Chorley is one of those uncomfortable people who dine about five and have prayers at nine."

It was wrong of Mr. Bolitho to make this random charge against the Englebury solicitor, for he knew absolutely nothing about the matter. He was, however, thoroughly uncomfortable. He was cold, damp, and hungry. He had visions of the "Green Man" at Englebury, of an ample dinner, a warm room, and a bottle of port wine. Was he going to adventure out again into this wretched night, after he had got thoroughly dry and comfortable, all because of a young man who seemed to pay no heed to the requirements of digestion?

It was quite dark when they drove at last over the bridge and up into the main thoroughfare of Englebury; and right cheerful looked the blazing shops of the small town. They passed under the

sign of the "Green Man" into the spacious archway ; the great bell summoned the ostler from out of the gloom ; they jumped down and stamped their feet ; and then they found themselves face-to-face with a very comely damsel, tall and slender, and dark of face, who in the absence of her sister, the landlady, wanted to know if the gentlemen would order dinner before going upstairs to their rooms. As she made the suggestion, she glanced up at a goodly row of joints and fowls that were suspended from the roof of the central hall, outside the capacious, shining, and smiling bar.

"You order the dinner, Bolitho," said Balfour. "I am going to see that the cob is looked to."

"Confound the cob," said the other ; but Balfour had already disappeared in the darkness ; so he turned with great contentment to the distinguished-looking and gracious young person, and entered into a serious consultation with her. Mr. Bolitho was not in the habit of letting either cobs or country solicitors stand in the way of his dinner.

And a very sound and substantial dinner it was that they had in the snug little room on the first

floor, after they had got on some dry clothing, and were growing warm again. There was a brisk fire blazing in the grate; there were no fewer than four candles in the room, two on the table and two on the mahogany sideboard. Balfour laughed at the business-like manner in which Mr. Bolitho ploughed his way through the homely feast; but he was sharply hungry himself; and he so far departed from his ordinary habits as to call for a tankard of foaming stout. The agreeable young lady herself waited on them; although she did not know as yet that one of the strangers wished to represent her native town in Parliament. She seemed a little surprised, however, when, at the end of dinner, the younger gentleman asked whether she could send him up a clay pipe, his own wooden one having gone wrong. She had overheard the two friends talking about very great persons indeed as though they were pretty familiar with them; and a fourpenny cigar from the bar would, she considered, have been more appropriate. But the other gentleman redeemed himself in her eyes by ordering a bottle of the very best port wine they had in the house.

“Gracious goodness,” cried Balfour, with a loud laugh ; “what do you mean, Bolitho ?”

“I mean to make myself comfortable,” said the other, doggedly.

“Oh, it is comfortable you call it,” remarked the younger man. “Well, it is a good phrase.”

“Yes, I mean to make myself comfortable,” said Mr. Bolitho, when he had drawn in his chair to the fire, and lit a cigar, and put a glass of port on the mantelpiece, “and I also mean to give you some advice—some good and excellent advice, which is all the more appropriate since you may be said to be beginning to-day your canvass of the borough of Englebury. Well, I have had to do with a good many candidates in my time ; but I will say this for you, that you are just about the last man in the world I would choose to run for a seat if I had any choice.”

“That is cheerful, at any rate,” said Balfour, who had lit his long clay, and was contentedly stretching out his legs to the fire. “Go on.”

“I say it deliberately. If you get in at all, it won’t be through any action on your own part.

I would almost rather fight the election for you in your absence. Why, man, you have no more notion of conciliating anybody than an Arctic bear has. Don't you know you are asking a great favour when you ask people to return you to Parliament? You don't suppose you can cheek every constituency as you cheeked those poor wretches at Ballinascreen."

"My dear philosopher and friend," said the culprit, "I am not aware of having ever addressed a word to any elector of Englebury, barring your Mr. Chorley."

"I don't mean here or now," said Bolitho, who thought he would read this young man a sound lesson when he was about it. "I mean always and everywhere. A man cannot get on in politics who blurts out his opinions as you do yours. You can't convince a man by calling him a fool. You have been spoiled. You got your first seat too easily; and you found yourself independent of the people who elected you. If you had had to conciliate your constituency as some men have, it would have been useful practice for you. I tell you, a member of Parliament cannot afford

to be continually declaring his opinions, as if he had all the wisdom in the world——”

Here the culprit, far from being meek and attentive, burst out laughing.

“The fact is, Bolitho, all this harangue means that you want me to be civil to Chorley. Doesn’t it, now?”

Mr. Bolitho, being in a pleasant humour, suffered a shrewd, bland smile to appear about the corners of his mouth.

“Well,” said Balfour, frankly, “I mean to be enormously civil to old Chorley—so long as he doesn’t show up with some humbug. But mind you, if that old thief, who wants to sell the borough in order to get a good price for his filched common, begins to do the high virtuous business, then the case becomes altered. Civil? Oh, yes, I shall be civil enough. But you don’t expect me to black his boots?”

“You see,” said Mr. Bolitho, slowly, “you are in rather an awkward position with regard to these two people—I will tell you that honestly. You have had no communication with them since you first saw them in Germany?”

“No, none.”

“Well, you know, my gay young friend, you pretty nearly put your foot in it by your chaffing old Chorley about selling the piece of green. Then, no sooner had they got over that, than Lady Sylvia—— you know what I mean.”

Balfour looked a bit annoyed.

“Leave Lady Sylvia out of it,” said he. “She does not want to interfere in these things at all.”

“No,” said Mr. Bolitho, cautiously, “but you see there is the effect of that—that remark of hers to be removed. The Chorleys may have forgotten—they will make allowances——”

“They can do as they like about that,” said Balfour, bluntly, “but Lady Sylvia won’t trouble them again. Now as to the bit of common?”

“Well, if I were you, I would say nothing about it at present.”

“I don’t mean to, nor in the future either.”

“You don’t intend to make him an offer?”

“Of course not.”

Mr. Bolitho looked at the young man. Had he been merely joking when he seemed to enter-

tain seriously the project of bribing Mr. Chorley by purchasing his land from him? Or had some new and alien influence thwarted his original purpose? Mr. Bolitho instantly thought of Lady Sylvia.

"Perhaps you are right," said he, after a second or two. "Chorley would be shy of taking an offer, after you had directly described the thing as bribing the town. But all the more you should be conciliatory to him and to his wife. Why should they fight for you?"

"I don't know."

"What have you to offer them?"

"Nothing."

"Then you are asking a great favour, as I said before."

"Well, you know, Bolitho, Englebury has its duty to perform. You shouldn't make it all a matter of private and personal interchange of interests. Englebury has its place in the Empire; it has the proud privilege of singling out a faithful and efficient person to represent it in Parliament; it has its relations with the British Constitution; and when it finds that it has the

opportunity of returning so distinguished a person as myself, why shouldn't it jump at the chance? You have no faith in public virtue, Bolitho. You would buy land and bribe. Now that is wrong."

"It's all very well for you to joke about it," said Mr. Bolitho, rather gloomily, "but you'll sing a different tune if you find yourself without a seat after the next General Election."

On the following morning they walked up through the town which Mr. Balfour aspired to represent towards Mr. Chorley's house. It was a bright morning after the rain; the sun shining pleasantly on the quaint old town, with its huddled red-and-white houses, its grey church, its high-arched bridge that spanned a turbidly yellow river. Mr. Chorley's house stood near the top of the hill—a plain, square, red-brick building, surrounded by plenty of laurels and other evergreens, and these again enclosed by a high brick wall. They were ushered into a small drawing-room, stuffed full of ornaments and smelling of musk. In a few moments Mr. and Mrs. Chorley entered together.

Surely nothing could be more friendly than the way in which they greeted the young man. The small, horsey-looking solicitor was prim and precise in his manner, it is true ; but then he was always so. As for Mrs. Chorley, she regarded the young man with a pleasant look from over her silver spectacles, and begged him and Mr. Bolitho to be seated, and hoped they had had an agreeable drive on that bright morning. And when Mr. Bolitho explained that they had arrived on the previous evening, and had put up at the "Green Man," she was good enough to express her regret that they had not come right on and accepted the hospitality of herself and her husband for the night.

"But perhaps," said she, suddenly, and with an equally sudden change in her manner, "perhaps Lady Sylvia is with you?"

"Oh, dear, no!" said Balfour, and he instantly changed the subject by beginning to talk about his experiences down in Somersetshire, and how he had heard by accident that Mr. Bolitho was in the neighbourhood of Englebury, and how he had managed to pick him up. That alarming

look of formality disappeared from Mrs. Chorley's face. Mr. Chorley suggested some sherry, which was politely declined. Then they had a talk about the weather.

But Balfour was not a timid man, and he disliked beating about the bush.

"Well, Mr. Chorley," said he, "how are your local politics? Government very unpopular? Or rather I should ask—as interesting me more nearly—is old Harnden still unpopular?"

"Mr. 'Arnden is not very popular at present," said Mr. Chorley, with some caution. "He does his duty well in Parliament, no doubt; but, after all, there are—certain courtesies which are due to one's constituents——"

"Exactly," said Balfour. "I have discovered that in the case of the place I represent. The courtesies that pass between me and the people of Ballinascreen are almost too beautiful. Well, what about the chance of a vacancy at the next General Election?"

In reply to this blunt question, Mr. Chorley regarded the young man with his shrewd, watchful, small blue eyes, and said, slowly,

"I don't know, Sir, that Mr. 'Arnden has any intention at present of resigning his seat?"

This guardedness was all thrown away on Balfour.

"What would be my chances," said he, curtly, "if I came down and contested the seat?"

Here Mrs. Chorley broke in. From the moment they had begun to speak of the next election, the expression of her face had changed. The thin lips were drawn more firmly together. Instead of the beaming maternal glances over her spectacles, there was a proud and cold look, that was at once awful and ominous.

"If I may be allowed to speak, Mr. Balfour," said she, in lofty accents, "I would say that it is rather strange that you should mention any such proposal to us. When we last spoke of it, you will remember that some remarks were applied to us by Lady Sylvia, which were never apologized for—by her, at least. Have you any explanation to make?"

There was a sudden flash of fire in the deep-set grey eyes. Apologize for his wife to such people as these?

“Explanation?” said he, and the tone in which he spoke caused the heart of Mr. Bolitho to sink within him. “If Lady Sylvia spoke hastily, that only convinced me the more of the folly of allowing women to interfere in politics. I think the business of an election is a matter to be settled between men.”

There was a second or two of awful silence. A thunderbolt seemed to have fallen. Mrs. Chorley rose.

“I, at least,” said she, in majestic accents and with an indescribable calm, “will not interfere in this election. Gentlemen, good morning. Eugenius, the chaise is at the door.”

With that she walked in a stately manner out of the room, leaving the burden of the situation on her unfortunate husband. He looked rather bewildered; but nevertheless he felt bound to assert the dignity of the family.

“I must say, Mr. Balfour,” said he, rather nervously, “that your language is—is unusual. Mrs. Chorley only asked for—for an expression of regret—an apology which was only our due after the remarks of—of Lady Sylvia——”

By this time Balfour had got on his feet, and taken his hat in his hand. All the Celtic blood in his veins was on fire.

“An apology!” he said. “Why, man, you must be mad! I tell you that every word my wife said was absolutely true; do you expect her to send you a humble letter, begging for your forgiveness? I apologized for her hastiness at the time; I am sorry I did. For what she said then, I say now—that it is quite monstrous you should suddenly propose to use your influence in the borough on behalf of a man who was an absolute stranger to you; and if you imagined that I was going to bribe you by buying that waste land, or going to bribe the borough by giving them a public green, then get that notion out of your head as soon as possible! Good morning, Mr. Chorley. Pray tell Mrs. Chorley that I am very sorry if I have hurt her feelings; but pray tell her too that my wife is not conscious of having said anything that demands an apology.”

And so this mad young man and his companion went out, and walked down the main street of

Englebury in the pleasant sunshine. And it was all in vain that Mr. Bolitho tried to put in his piteous prayers and remonstrances. The borough? He would see the borough sink into the bottomless pit before he would allow his wife to apologize for a speech that did her infinite honour! The election? He would fight the place if there were ten thousand Chorleys arranged against him!

“I tell you you have gone stark staring mad,” said the despairing Mr. Bolitho. “Chorley will immediately go over to Harnden—you will see. His wife will goad him to it. And how can you think of contesting the seat against Harnden and Chorley combined?”

Nature had not conferred a firm jaw on Mr. Hugh Balfour for nothing.

“I tell you in turn,” said the young man, who was neither to hold nor to bind, simply because something had been said about his wife, “I tell you in turn that I mean to contest the seat all the same; and, what is more, by the Lord Harry, I mean to win it!”

CHAPTER III.

AT A CERTAIN CLUB.

“BOLITHO,” said Mr. Hugh Balfour, as the two companions were preparing to leave for the London train, “when you see my wife, don’t say anything to her about this affair. She would only be annoyed to think that she was in any way connected with such a wretched wrangle. Women are better out of these things.”

Now Mr. Bolitho was somewhat vexed. The guiding principle in life of this bland, elderly, easy-going gentleman was to make friends everywhere, or at least acquaintances, so that you could scarcely have mentioned to him a borough in England in which he did not know, more or less slightly, some man of influence. And here he had been involved in a quarrel—all because of the impetuous temper of this foolish young man—with the ruling politician of Englebury !

"I don't think," said he, with a wry smile, "that I am likely to see Lady Sylvia."

"What do you mean?" Balfour asked, as they set out to walk to the station.

"Oh, well, you know," replied the astute Parliamentary agent, with this sorry laugh still on his face, "I have a strong suspicion—you will correct me if I am wrong—that Lady Sylvia looks on me as a rather dangerous and disreputable person, who is likely to lead you into bad ways—bribery and corruption, and all that. I am quite sure from her manner to me at Mainz that she considered me to be the author of an abominable conspiracy to betray the people of Englebury——"

"Yes, I think she did," Balfour said, with a laugh, "and I think she was right. You were the author of it, no doubt, Bolitho. But then it was all a joke—we were all in it, to the extent of talking about it. What I wish to impress on your young mind is that women don't understand jokes of that sort—and—and—it would have been wiser to have said nothing about it before Lady Sylvia. In fact," he added, with more

firmness, "I don't wish my wife to be mixed up in any electioneering squabble."

"Quite right, quite right," responded Mr. Bolitho, with grave suavity: but he knew very well why Mr. Hugh Balfour had never asked him to dine at The Lilacs.

"Now," said Balfour, when they had reached the station and got their tickets, "we shall be in London between six and seven. What do you say to dining with me? I shall be a bachelor for a few evenings, before going down to the country."

Mr. Bolitho was nothing loth. A club dinner would be grateful after his recent experience of rural inns.

"At the Oxford and Cambridge, or the Reform? Which shall it be?" asked the young man, carelessly.

But Mr. Bolitho regarded it as a serious matter. He was intimately acquainted with the cooking at both houses—in fact, with the cooking at pretty nearly every club in the parish of St. James's. After some delay, he chose the Reform; and he was greatly relieved when he saw his companion go off to telegraph to the steward of the

club to put down his guest's name in the books. That showed forethought. He rather dreaded Mr. Balfour's well-known indifference about such matters. But if he was telegraphing to the steward, surely there was nothing to fear?

And when at length they reached London, and had driven straight on to the club, the poor man had amply earned his dinner. He had been cross-examined about this person and that person; had been driven into declaring his opinion on this question and that; had been alternately laughed at and lectured until he thought the railway journey was never going to end. And, now as they sat down at the small white table, Mr. Balfour was in a more serious mood; and was talking about the agricultural labourer. A paper had just been read at the Farmers' Club which would doubtless be very valuable as giving the employer's side of the question; did Mr. Bolitho know where a full report of that address could be got?

Mr. Bolitho was mutely staring at the framed bill of fare that the waiter had brought to the table. Was it possible, then, that Balfour had

ordered no dinner at all? Was he merely going to ask—in flagrant violation of the rules of the club—for some haphazard thing to take the place of a properly prepared dinner.

“Will you have some soup? Do you ever take soup?” asked his host absently; and his heart sank within him.

“Yes, I will take some soup,” said he, gloomily.

They had the soup. Mr. Balfour was again plunged in the question of agricultural labour. He did not notice that the waiter was calmly standing over them.

“Oh,” said he, suddenly recalling himself, “fish? Do you ever take fish, Bolitho?”

“Well, yes, I will take some fish,” said Mr. Bolitho, somewhat petulantly; at this rate of waiting they would finish their dinner about two in the morning.

“Bring some fish, waiter—any fish—salmon,” said he at a venture; for he was searching in a handful of papers for a letter he wished to show his guest. When he was informed that there was no salmon, he asked for any fish that was ready,

or any joint that was ready ; and then he succeeded in finding the letter.

They had some fish, too. He was talking now about the recently formed association of the employers of labour. He absently poured out a glass of water, and drank some of it. Mr. Bolitho's temper was rising.

"My dear fellow," Balfour said, suddenly observing that his guest's plate was empty. "I beg your pardon. You'll have some joint now, won't you? They always have capital joints here ; and it saves so much time to be able to come in at a moment's notice and have a cut. I generally make that my dinner. Waiter, bring some beef, or mutton, or whatever there is. And you were saying, Bolitho, that this association might turn out a big thing?"

Mr. Bolitho was now in a pretty thoroughgoing rage. He had not had a drop of anything to drink. In fact he would not drink anything now—not even water. He would sooner parch with thirst. But if ever—he vowed to himself—if ever again he was so far left to himself as to accept an invitation to dine with this thick-headed and

glowering-eyed Scotchman, then he would allow them to put strychnine in every dish.

If Mr. Bolitho had not got angry over the wretched dinner he was asked to eat, he would frankly have reminded his host that he wanted something to drink. But his temper once being up, he had grown exceedingly bitter about the absence of wine. He had become proud. He longed for a glass of the water before him; but he would not take it. He would wait for the satisfaction of seeing his enemy overcome with shame when his monstrous neglect was revealed to him.

Temper, however, is a bad substitute for wine, when a man is thirsty. Moreover, to all appearance, this crass idiot was likely to finish his dinner and go away without any suspicion that he had grievously broken the laws of common decency and hospitality. He took a little sip of water now and again, as innocently as a dipping swallow. And at length Mr. Bolitho could bear it no longer. Thirst and rage combined were choking him.

“Don’t you think, Balfour,” said he, with an

outward calm that revealed nothing of the wild volcano within, "don't you think one might have a glass of wine of some sort?"

Balfour, with a stare of surprise, glanced round the table. There certainly was no wine there.

"My dear fellow," said he with the most obvious and heartfelt compunction, "I really beg your pardon. What wine do you drink? Will you have a glass of sherry?"

Bolitho was on the point of returning to his determination of drinking nothing at all; but the consuming thirst within was too strong for him. He was about to accept this offer sulkily when the member for Ballinascreen seemed to recollect that he was entertaining a guest.

"Oh, no," he said, anxiously; "of course you will have some champagne. Waiter, bring the wine-list. There you are, Bolitho; pick out what you want like a good fellow. It was really very forgetful of me."

By this time they had got to the celery and cheese. Mr. Bolitho had scarcely had any dinner; his thirst had prevented his eating, and his anger had driven him into a most earnest and polite

attention to his companion's conversation. But when the champagne arrived, and he had drank the first glass at a draught, nature revived within him. The strained and glassy look left his eyes; his natural bland expression began to appear. He attacked the cheese and celery with vigour. The wine was sound and dry, and Mr. Bolitho had some good lee-way to make up. He began to look on Balfour as not so bad a sort of fellow, after all; it was only his tremendous earnestness that made him forgetful of the smaller things around him.

“And so,” said he, with a dawning smile breaking over his face, “you mean to go, unaided and alone, and fight the whole paction of your enemies in Englebury—the Chorleys, old Harnden, Reginald Key, and the hunting parson, all together?”

“Well,” said Mr. Balfour, cheerfully, “I shan't try it if I can see an easier chance elsewhere. But I am not afraid. Don't you see how I should appeal to the native dignity of the electors to rise and assert itself against the political slavery that has been imposed on the borough? Bolitho,

Englebury shall be free. Englebury shall suffer no longer the dictation of an interested solicitor."

"That's all very well," said Mr. Bolitho, "but Chorley owns half the *Englebury Mercury*."

"I will start the *Englebury Banner*."

"And suppose Harnden should resign in favour of Key?"

"My dear friend, I have heard on very good authority that there is not the least chance of Key being in England at that time. The Government are sure to try the effect of some other malarious place. I have heard several consulships and island-governorships suggested; but you are quite right—he is a hard man to kill; and I believe their only hesitation so far has been owing to the fact that there was no sufficiently deadly place open. But they will be even with him sooner or later. Then as for your hunting parson—I could make friends with him in ten minutes. I never saw a hunting parson; but I have a sneaking liking for him. I can imagine him—a rosy-checked fellow, broad-shouldered, good-humoured, a famous judge of horse-flesh and of port wine, generous in his way, but exacting a

stern discipline in exchange for his blankets and joints at Christmas. He shall be my ally; not my enemy."

"Ah," said Mr. Bolitho, with a sentimental sigh, "it is a great pity you could not persuade Lady Sylvia to go down with you. When a candidate has a wife—young, pretty, pleasant-mannered—it is wonderful what help she can give him."

"Yes, I dare say," said Balfour, with a slight change in his manner. "But it is not Lady Sylvia's wish—and it certainly isn't mine—that she should meddle in any election. There are some women fitted for that kind of thing—doubtless excellent women in their way; but she is not one of them, and I don't particularly care that she should be."

Mr. Bolitho felt that he had made a mistake; and he resolved in future not to mention Lady Sylvia at all. This wild adoration on the part of the young man might pass away—it might even pass away before the General Election came on, in which case Balfour might not be averse from having her pretty face and serious eyes win him

over a few friends. In the mean time Mr. Bolitho hinted something about a cigar; and the two companions went upstairs.

Now when Balfour drove up that night to his house in Piccadilly, he was surprised to see an unnecessary number of rooms dimly lighted. He had telegraphed to the housekeeper, whom they always left there, to have a bedroom ready for him; as he intended to have his meals at his club during his short stay in town. When he rang, it was Jackson who opened the door.

“Hallo, Jackson,” said he, “are you here?”

“Yes, sir. Her ladyship sent us up two days ago to get the house ready. There is a letter for you, sir, upstairs.”

He went upstairs to his small study, and got the letter. It was a pretty little message—somewhat formal in style, to be sure; but affectionate and dutiful. Lady Sylvia had considered it probable he might wish to have some gentleman friends to dine with him while in town, and she had sent the servants up to have everything ready, so that he should not have to depend entirely on his club. She could get on very well

with Anne; and she had got old Blake over from the Hall to sleep in the house. She added that as he might have important business to transact in connection with his visit to Englebury, he was on no account to cut short his stay in London prematurely. She was amusing herself very well. She had called on So-and-So and So-and-So. Her papa had just sent her two brace of pheasants, and any number of rabbits. The harriers had met at Willowby Clump on the previous Saturday. The School Board school was to be finished on the following week—and so forth.

He put the letter on the table, his eyes still dwelling on it thoughtfully; and he lit his pipe, and sank into a big easy-chair.

“Poor old Syllabus,” he was thinking—for he caught up this nickname from Johnnie Blythe—“this is her notion of duty, that she should shut herself up in an empty house.”

And indeed as he lay and pondered there, the house in which he was at this moment seemed very empty too; and his wife, he felt, was far away from him—separated from him by something more than miles. It was all very well for him

to grow proud and reserved when it was suggested to him that Lady Sylvia should help him in his next canvass; it was all very well for him to build up theories to the effect that her pure, noble, sensitive mind were better kept aloof from the vulgar traffic of politics. But even now he began to recall some of the dreams he had dreamed in his bachelor days—in his solitary walks home from the House, in his friendly confidences with his old chum at Exeter, and most of all when he was wandering with Lady Sylvia herself, on those still summer evenings, under the great elms of Willowby Park. He had looked forward to a close and eager companionship, an absolute identity of interests and feelings, a mutual and constant help-giving which had never been realized. Suddenly he jumped to his feet, and began to walk up and down the room.

He would not give himself up to idle dreams and vain regrets. It was doubtless better as it was. Was he a child, to long for sympathy when something unpleasant had to be gone through? She herself had shown him how her quick, proud spirit had revolted from a proposal that was no

uncommon thing in public life ; better that she should preserve this purity of conscience than that she should be able to aid him by dabbling in doubtful schemes. The rough work of the world was not for that gentle and beautiful bride of his ; but rather the sweet content and quiet of country ways. He began to fret about the engagements of the next few days to which he had pledged himself. He would rather have gone down at once to The Lilacs, to forget the babble and turmoil and vexations of politics in the tender society of that most loving of all friends and companions. However, that was impossible. Instead, he sat down and wrote her an affectionate and merry letter, in which he said not one word of what had happened at Englebury, beyond recording the fact of his having been there. Why should he annoy her by letting her suppose that she had been mixed up in a squabble with such a person as Eugenius Chorley ?

CHAPTER IV.

HIS RETURN.

IT was with a buoyant sense of work well done that Balfour, on a certain Saturday morning, got into a Hansom and left Piccadilly for Victoria Station. He had telegraphed to Lady Sylvia to drive over from The Lilacs to meet him, and he proposed that now he and she should have a glad holiday-time. Would she run down to Brighton for the week preceding Christmas? Would she go over to Paris for the New Year? Or would she prefer to spend both Christmas and New Year among the evergreens of her English home, with visits to neighbouring friends, and much excitement about the decoration of the church, and a pleased satisfaction in giving away port wine and flannels to the properly pious poor? Anyhow, he would share in her holiday. He would ride

with her, drive with her, walk with her; he would shoot Lord Willowby's rabbits, and have luncheon at the Hall; in the evening, in the warm, hushed room, she would play for him while he smoked, or they would have confidential chatting over the appearance, and circumstances, and dispositions of their friends. What had this tender and beautiful child to do with politics? She herself had shown him what was her true sphere; he would not have that shy and sensitive conscience, that proud, pure spirit, hardened by rude associations. It is true, Balfour had a goodly bundle of papers, reports, and blue-books in his bag. But that was merely for form's sake—a precaution, perhaps, against his having to spend a solitary half-hour after she had gone to bed at nights. There could be no harm, for example, in his putting into shape, for further use, the notes he had made down in Somersetshire, just as occasion offered. But he would not seek the occasion.

And all things combined to make this reunion with his wife a happy one. It was a pleasant omen that, whereas he had left London in a cold grey fog, no sooner had he got away from the

great town than he found the country shining in clear sunlight. Snow had fallen over-night; but while the snow in Buckingham Palace Road was trampled into brown mud, here it lay with a soft, white lustre on the silent fields, and the hedges, and the woods. Surely it was only a bridal robe that Nature wore on this beautiful morning—a half-transparent robe of pearly white, that caught here and there a pale tint of blue from the clear skies overhead. He had a whole bundle of weekly newspapers, illustrated and otherwise, in the carriage with him, but he never thought of reading. And though the wind was cold, he let it blow freely through the open windows; this was better than hunting through the rookeries of London.

He caught sight of her just as the train was slowing into the station. She was seated high in the phaeton that stood in the roadway, and she was eagerly looking out for him. Her face was flushed a rose-red with the brisk driving through the keen wind; the sunlight touched the firmly-braided masses of her hair and the delicate oval of her cheek; and as he went out of the station-house into the road, the beautiful, tender, grey-

blue eyes were lit up by such a smile of gladness as ought to have been sufficient welcome to him.

“Well, old Syllabus,” said he, “how have you been? Crying your eyes out?”

“Oh, no; not at all,” she said, seriously. “I have been very busy. You will see what I have been doing. And what did you mean by sending the servants down again?”

“I did not want to have you starve, while I had the club to fall back on. Where the——”

But at this moment the groom appeared, with the packages he had been sent for. Balfour got up beside his wife, and she was about to drive off, when they were accosted by a gentlemanly-looking man who had come out of the station.

“I beg your pardon——Mr. Balfour, I believe?”

“That is my name.”

“I beg your pardon, I am sure; but I have an appointment with Lord Willowby—and—and I can’t get a fly here——”

“Oh, I’ll drive you over,” said Balfour, for he happened to be in an excellent humour: had he not been, he would probably have told the stranger

where to get a fly at the village. The stranger got in behind. Perhaps Lady Sylvia would, in other circumstances, have entered into conversation with a gentleman who was a friend of her father's; but there was a primness about his whiskers, and a certain something about his dress and manner, that spoke of the City, and of course she could not tell whether his visit was one of courtesy or of commerce. She continued to talk to her husband, so that neither of the two people behind could overhear.

And Balfour had not the slightest consciousness of caution or restraint in talking to this bright and beautiful young wife of his. It seemed to him quite natural now that he should cease to bother this loving and sensitive companion of his about his anxieties and commonplace labours. He chatted to her about their favourite horses and dogs; he heard what pheasants had been shot in Uphill Wood the day before; he was told what invitations to dinner awaited his assent; and all the while they were cheerfully whirling through the keen, exhilarating air, crossing the broad bars of sunlight on the glittering road, and

startling the blackbirds in the hedges, that shook down the powdery snow as they darted into the dense holly-trees.

“You have not told me,” said Lady Sylvia, in a somewhat measured tone, though he did not notice that, “whether your visit to Englebury was successful.”

“Oh,” said he, carelessly, “that was of no importance. Nothing was to be done then. It will be time enough to think of Englebury when the General Election comes near.”

Instead of Englebury, he began to talk to her about Brighton. He thought they might drop down there for a week before Christmas. He began to tell her of all the people whom he knew who happened to be at Brighton at the moment; it would be a pleasant variety for her; she would meet some charming people.

“No, thank you, Hugh,” she said, somewhat coldly; “I don’t think I will go down to Brighton at present. But I think you ought to go.”

“I?” said he, with a stare of amazement.

“Yes; these people might be of use to you. If a General Election is coming on, you cannot

tell what influence they might be able to give you."

"My dear child," said he, fairly astonished that she should speak in this hard tone about certain quite innocent people in Brighton. "I don't want to see those people because they might be of use to me. I wanted you to go down to Brighton merely to please you."

"Thank you, I don't think I can go down to Brighton."

"Why?"

"Because I cannot leave papa at present," she said.

"What's the matter with him?" said Balfour, getting from mystery to mystery.

"I cannot tell you now," she said, in a low voice. "But I don't wish to leave The Lilacs, so long as he is at the Hall; and he has been going very little up to London of late."

"Very well; all right," said Balfour, cheerfully. "If you prefer The Lilacs to Brighton, so do I. I thought it might be a change for you—that was all."

But why should she seem annoyed because he

had proposed to take her down to Brighton? And why should she speak spitefully of a number of friends who would have given her a most hearty welcome? Surely all these people could not be in league with the British House of Commons to rob her of her husband.

In any case, Balfour took no heed of these passing fancies of hers. He had registered a mental vow to the effect that, whenever he could not quite understand her, or whenever her wishes clashed with his, he would show an unfailing consideration and kindness towards this tender soul who had placed her whole life in his hands. But that consideration was about to be put to the test of a sharp strain. With some hesitation she informed him, as they drove up to the Hall, that her uncle and aunt were staying there for a day or two. Very well; there was no objection to that. If he had to shake hands with Major the Honourable Stephen Blythe, was there not soap and water at The Lilacs? But Lady Sylvia proceeded to say, with still greater diffidence, that probably they would be down again in about ten days. They had been in the habit of spending

Christmas at the Hall ; and Johnny and Honoria had come too ; so that it was a sort of annual family party. Very well ; he had no objection to that either. It was no concern of his where Major Blythe ate his Christmas dinner. But when Lady Sylvia went on to explain—with increasing hesitation—that herself and her husband would be expected to be of this Christmas gathering, Mr. Balfour mentally made use of a phrase which was highly improper. She did not hear it, of course. They drove up to the Hall in silence ; and when they got into the house, Balfour shook hands with Major Blythe with all apparent good nature.

Lord Willowby had wished the stranger to follow him into the library. In a few moments he returned to the drawing-room. He was obviously greatly disturbed.

“ You must excuse me, Sylvia ; I cannot possibly go over with you to lunch. I have some business which will detain me half an hour at least—perhaps more. But your uncle and aunt can go with you.”

That was the first Balfour had heard of Major Blythe and his wife having been invited to lunch

at his house ; but had he not sworn to be grandly considerate ? He said nothing. Lady Sylvia turned to her two relatives. Now, had Lord Willowby been going over to The Lilacs, his brother might have ventured to accompany him ; but Major Blythe scarcely liked the notion of thrusting his head into that lion's den all by himself.

“My dear,” said the doughty warrior to his wife, “I think we will leave the young folks to themselves for to-day—if they will kindly excuse us. You know I promised to walk over and see that mare at the farm.”

Balfour said nothing at all. He was quite content when he got into the phaeton, his wife once more taking the reins. He bade good-bye to Willowby Hall without any pathetic tremor in his voice.

“Hugh,” said Lady Sylvia, somewhat timidly, “I think you are prejudiced against my uncle—I am very sorry——”

“I don't look on your uncle,” said Balfour, with much coolness, “as being at all necessary to my existence ; and I am sure I am not necessary

to his. We each of us can get on pretty well without the other."

"But it is dreadful to have members of one family in—in a position of antagonism or dislike to each other," she ventured to say, with her heart beating a trifle more rapidly.

"Well, yes," he said, cheerfully. "I suppose Major Blythe and I are members of the same family, as we are all descended from Adam. If that is what you mean, I admit the relationship; but not otherwise. Come, Sylvia, let's talk about something else. Have you seen the Von Rosens lately?"

For an instant she hesitated, eager, disappointed, and wistful; but she pulled her courage together, and answered with seeming goodwill.

"Oh, yes," she said, "Mr. von Rosen called yesterday. And the strangest thing has happened. An uncle of his wife has just died in some distant place in America, and has left a large amount of property to Mrs. von Rosen, on condition she goes out there some time next year, and remains for a year at the house that has been left her. And

she is not to take her children with her. Mr. von Rosen declares she won't go. She won't leave her children for a whole year. They want her to go and live in some desert place just below the Rocky Mountains."

"A desert!" he cried. "Why, don't you know that the neighbourhood of the Rocky Mountains has been my ideal harbour of refuge, whenever I thought of the two worst chances that can befall one? If I were suddenly made a pauper, I should go out there and get a homestead free from the Government, and try my hand at building up my own fortunes. Or if I were suddenly to break down in health, I should make immediately for the high plains of Colorado, where the air is like champagne; and I would become a stock-raiser and a mighty hunter in spite of all the bronchitis or consumption that could attack you. Why, I know a lot of fellows out there now—they live the rudest life all day long—riding about the plains to look after their herds, making hunting excursions up into the mountains, and so forth; and in the evening they put on dress-coats to dinner, and have music, and try to make them-

selves believe they are in Piccadilly or Pall Mall. Who told her it was a desert?"

"I suppose it would be a desert to her without her children," said Lady Sylvia, simply.

"Then we will go over after lunch and reason with that mad creature," said he. "The notion of throwing away a fortune because she won't go out and live in that splendid climate for a single year!"

What the result of this mission of theirs was need not be stated at present. Enough that Balfour and his wife, having spent the best part of the afternoon with these neighbouring friends of theirs, went home to dine by themselves in the evening. And Balfour had been looking forward during this past fortnight to the delight of having his wife all to himself again; and he had pictured the still little room, her seated at the piano, perhaps, or perhaps both seated at the fire, and all troubles and annoyances hunted out into the cold winter night. This was the new plan. When he looked at her—at the true, sweet, serious, trusting eyes, and at the calm, pensive, guileless forehead—he began to wonder how he could ever, in his

selfish imaginations, have thought of having her become a sort of appanage of himself in his public life. Would he wish her to become a shifting and dexterous wire-puller, paying court to this man, flattering another, patronizing a third, all to further her husband's interest? That, at all events, was not what he wished her to be now. He admired her for her courageous protest against that suggested scheme for the bribing of Englebury. Not for a hundred seats in Parliament would he have his wife make interested professions of friendship for such people as the Chorleys. The proper place for the high-souled young matron was the head of her own table, or a seat by the fire in her own drawing-room; and it was there that he hoped to gain rest, and sweet encouragement and a happy forgetfulness of all the vulgar strife of the outside world.

"Sylvia," he said, suddenly, at dinner, "why do you look so depressed? What is the matter with you?"

"Oh, nothing," she said, rousing herself, and making an effort—not very successful—to talk about this American trip. Then she relapsed into

silence again ; and the dinner was not a cheerful feast.

“Are you tired?” he asked again. “Perhaps you had better go and lie down for a while.”

No, she was not tired. Nor did she go, as was her wont after dinner, into the next room and begin to play a few of the airs and pieces that he liked. She sat down by the fire, opposite him. Her face was troubled ; and her eyes distant and sad.

“Come, Sylvia,” he said, as he lit his pipe, “you are vexed about something. What is it? What is the trouble?”

“I am not vexed, really. It is no matter,” she again answered.

Well, as his motto was “Live, and let live,” he was not bound to goad her into confidences she was unwilling to make ; and as the enforced silence of the room was a rather painful and lugubrious business, he thought he might as well have a look at one or two of the papers he had brought down. He went and fetched his bag. He sat down with his back to the light ; and was soon deep in some report as to the water-supply of London.

Happening to look up, however, he found that his wife was silently crying. Then he impatiently threw the book on the table, and demanded to know the cause. Perhaps there was some roughness in his voice ; but, at all events, she suddenly flung herself down before him, buried her face in his knees, and burst into a fit of wild sobbing, in which she made her stammering confession. It was all about her father. She could not bear to see him suffering this terrible anxiety. It was killing him. She was sure the man who had come down in the train had something to do with these pecuniary troubles, and it was dreadful to her to think that she and her husband had all they could desire, while her father was driven to despair. All this and more she sobbed out, like a penitent child.

Balfour put his hand gently on her soft brown hair.

“ Is that all, Sylvia ? ” he said. “ If it is only money your father wants, he can have that. I will ask him.”

She rose—her eyes still streaming with tears—and kissed him twice. And then she grew gayer

in spirit, and went and played some music for him, while he smoked his pipe. But as he smoked, he thought; and his thoughts were rather bitter about a man who, wanting money, had not the courage to ask for it, but had degraded his daughter into the position of being a beggar for it. And as Mr. Balfour was a business-like person, though he had not been trained up to commerce, he determined to ascertain exactly how Lord Willowby's affairs stood, before proffering him this promised help.

CHAPTER V.

FRIENDS AND NEIGHBOURS.

THERE was a brisk fire burning in the breakfast-room at The Lilacs; and the frosty December sunlight, streaming through the window, touched the white tablecloth with a ruddy and cheerful glow. A man of about thirty, tall, stalwart-looking, with a huge brown moustache, and a partially-cropped beard, light blue eyes, and a healthy complexion, stood on the hearth-rug, with his hands complacently fixed in his pocket. This was Count—or rather, as he had dropped his courtesy title since settling down in England, Mr.—von Rosen, who had served as lieutenant in the Franco-German War, and had subsequently fallen in love with, and married, a young English lady, who had persuaded him to make England his home. He was a young man of superfluous

energy, of great good humour, and good spirits, who made himself a nuisance to the neighbourhood in which he lived by the fashion in which he insisted on other people joining him in his industrious idleness. For example, he had on this very morning, at seven o'clock, sent a letter to Mr. Hugh Balfour, of whose arrival at The Lilacs he had only heard on the previous night, urging him to join a certain shooting-party. Lady Sylvia was to drive over with them; and spend the day with two ladies whom she knew. He himself would call at nine. And so he stood here with his hands in his pockets, apparently quite contented, but nevertheless wondering why English people should be so late with their breakfast.

“Ah,” said he, with his face brightening, as Balfour entered the room. “You are ready to go? But I have to beg your pardon very much—my man says you were not awake when he brought the letter—it was stupid of him to send it to your room——”

“On the contrary,” said Balfour—as he mechanically took up a handful of letters that were

lying on the table—"I have to beg your pardon for keeping you waiting. I thought I would put on my shooting-boots before coming down. Lady Sylvia will be here presently ; come, what do you say to having some breakfast with us ?"

He was scanning the outside of the various envelopes with something of an absent air. There was nothing meditative about the German ex-lieutenant. He had once or twice allowed his highly practical gaze to fall on a certain game-pie.

"A second breakfast ?" said he. "Yes, perhaps it is better. My first breakfast was at six. And in these short days, it is foolishness to waste time at the luncheon. Oh yes, I will have some breakfast. And in the mean time why do you not read your letters ?"

"Well, the fact is," said Balfour, "my wife thinks I should have a clear holiday down here ; and I have been wondering whether it is any use——"

But quite mechanically, while he was speaking, he had opened one of the letters, and he paused in his speech as he read its contents.

“By Jove,” said he, partly to himself and partly to his companion, “they must be pretty certain that I shall be in the next Parliament, or they would not offer to put this in my hands. Perhaps they don’t know that I am sure to be kicked out of Ballinascreen.”

At this moment Lady Sylvia entered the room ; and that young lady went up to the German lieutenant in the most winning and gracious way, for he was a great friend of hers, and thanked him very prettily for the trouble he had taken about this invitation.

“Trouble ?” he said, with a laugh. “No, no. It is a good drive over to Mr. Lefevre’s, and I shall have nice company. And you will find him such a fine fellow—such a good, fine fellow, if you will meet him some night at our house, Lady Sylvia ; and your husband will see, when we begin the shooting, that there is no selfishness in him at all—he will prefer that his friends have more shooting than himself, and his keepers they know that too—and my wife, she says if you will be so good as to stay with her all the day, we will come back that way in the afternoon—and it is better still, a

great deal better, if you and Mr. Balfour will stay to dine with us."

Lady Sylvia was very pleased and grateful. Apart from her personal liking for these friends of hers, she was glad to find her husband taking to the amusements and interests of this country life. She said that Mr. von Rosen's plan would be very agreeable to her if it suited her husband; and then she turned to him. He was still regarding that letter.

"What do you say, Hugh?" she asked.

"Oh, yes," he answered, as if startled out of some reverie. "That is very kind of you, Von Rosen. It would be a delightful day. The fact is, however, I am not quite sure that I ought to go, though nothing would give me greater pleasure as I have just got an offer here that is rather flattering to a young member who has not done much work in the House—it is rather an important measure they propose to put into my hands—well, I suppose I shall only be a sort of junior counsel to Lord ——, but at least I could get up his case for him. Well, now, I must see these two men at once. Sylvia," he continued, turning

to his wife, "if I asked these two friends of mine to run down here to-morrow to dinner, I suppose you could put them up for the night?"

All the glad light had gone from her face. They had sat down at the table by this time: and before answering him she asked Mr. von Rosen whether he would not help himself to something or other that was near him. Then she said, in a somewhat precise fashion——

"I think it would look rather singular to ask two strangers down here for a single night at the present time."

"Why singular?" said he, with a stare.

"So near Christmas," she continued, in the same proud and cold way, "people are supposed to have made up their family parties. It is scarcely a time to invite strangers."

"Oh, well," said he, with a good-natured laugh, "I did not mean to offend you. I dare say you are right; an evening devoted to talking about this Bill would not have been lively for you. However, I must see my two patrons—and that at once. Von Rosen, would you mind saying to Mr. Lefevre how much I thank him for his friendly

offer? I fear I must let you have your drive over by yourself."

It was by the merest accident that he happened to notice his wife's face. When he saw the look of pain and disappointment that passed over it, he did not quite know what he had done to produce that feeling, but he altered his determination in a second.

"By the way," said he, "I might as well go up to London to-morrow. Yes; that will be better. I will telegraph to them to dine with me at the club; and to-day I can give up to your first-rate little arrangement. Come, Von Rosen, you have not finished already?"

"I do not wish to waste time," said that inveterate idler. "The daylight is very short now. You have finished, too?"

And so they set out; Lady Sylvia having promised to go over to Mrs. von Rosen during the day, and remain until the evening. As they drove off in the dog-cart, Balfour seemed rather preoccupied. When he remarked, "Things have come to a bonny cripus!" what was his companion to make of that absurd phrase? Von Rosen did

not know the story of the small boy in northern parts who was found bitterly sobbing, and digging his knuckles into his eyes; and who, on being asked what was the matter, replied, in language which has to be softened for southern ears, "Things have come to a bonny cripus; I only called my father an old fool, and he went and kicked me behind." It was the introductory phrase of this insulted boy that Balfour used. "Things have come to a bonny cripus," said he.

They drove along the crisp and crackling road. The hoar-frost on the hedges was beginning to melt; the sunlight had draped the bare twigs in a million of rainbow-jewels. The copper-coloured sun shone over the black woods and the dank green fields.

"Women are strange creatures," said Balfour again; and this was a more intelligible remark.

"Why do you say that?" asked the simple lieutenant, who had noticed nothing at breakfast beyond the coffee and the game-pie.

"I do believe," said Balfour, with a smile which was not altogether a glad one, "that my wife is beginning positively to hate everybody and every

thing connected with Parliament and politics ; and that is a lively look-out for me. You know I can't go on staying down here. And yet I shouldn't wonder if when Parliament meets she refused to go up to London."

"No, no, no," said the lieutenant, "there you are very wrong. It is not reasonable—not at all reasonable. She may like the country better ; but it is not reasonable. That is what I tell my wife now—she declares she will not go to live in America for a year and leave her children—and I say to her, ' You will think again about that. It is a great trouble that you will leave your children—it will be a great sorrow for a time ; but what will you think of yourself after, if you do not do what is right for them ? When they grow up, when they want money, what will you think if you have thrust away all that property—and only for a single year's absence ? ' "

"And has your wife proved reasonable ; has she consented to go ? " asked Balfour.

Von Rosen shrugged his shoulders.

"No—not yet. But I will not argue with her. I will leave her to think. Oh, you do not know

what a woman will do, if she thinks it is for the good of her children. At present, it is all 'Oh, never, never! Leave my darling little girl, so that she won't know me when I come back? Not for all the money in America!' Well, that is natural too, though it is foolishness. You would not like to have your wife with too hard a heart. And I say to her, 'Yes, I will not ask you. We are not so very poor that you must suffer great pain. If you will give up the American property, give it up, and no more to be said.' But I know. She is reasoning with herself now. She will go."

"Do you think she will?" said Balfour, thoughtfully. "Do you think she will give up so much of her own feeling if she thinks it right?"

"Know?" said the tall young German, with one of his hearty laughs. "Yes, I know that very well. Oh, there is no one so sensible as my wife—not any one that I know anywhere—if you can show her what is right. But if you ask me what I think of her uncle, that will cause so much trouble all for his nonsense, then I think he was

a most wretched fellow, a most wretched and pitiful fellow." * * *

Here occurred an unintelligible growl, whether in German or English phraseology his companion could not say ; but doubtless the muttered words were not polite. Another man would probably have given additional force to this expression of feeling by twitching at the reins ; but Von Rosen never vented his rage on a horse.

They had a capital day's sport, although Balfour, who was evidently thinking of anything in the world rather than pheasants, rabbits, and hares, shot very badly indeed. Their luncheon was brought to them at a farm-house, the mistress of the farm giving them the use of her sacred parlour, in which all the curiosities of ornament and natural history contributed by three generations were religiously stored. They got back to Von Rosen's house about six ; just in time for a cup of tea and a chat before dressing for an early country dinner.

Surely, one or two of us who were sitting round the table that evening must have thought, surely these two young people ought to have been happy

enough, if outward circumstances have anything to do with content of mind. There was he, in the prime of youthful manhood, with strength written in every outline of the bony frame, and in every lineament of the firm, resolute, and sufficiently handsome head, rich beyond the possibilities of care, and having before him all the hopefulness and stimulus of a distinguished public career; she, young, high-born, and beautiful, with those serious and shy eyes that went straight to the heart of the person she addressed and secured her friends everywhere, also beyond the reach of sordid cares, and most evidently regarded by her husband with all affection and admiration. What trouble, other than mere imaginary nonsense, could enter into these linked lives? Well, there was present at this dinner that Cassandra of married life who was mentioned in the first chapter of this highly moral and instructive tale; and she would have answered these questions quickly enough. She would have assumed—for she knew nothing positive about the matter—that these two were now beginning to encounter the bitter disillusionising experience of post-nuptial life. The husband was beginning to

recognize the fact that his wife was not quite the glorious creature he had imagined her to be ; he was looking back with a wistful regret to the perfectly false ideal of her he had formed before marriage ; while she, having dreamed that she was marrying a lover, and having woke up to find she had only married a husband, was suffering untold and secret misery because she found her husband's heart transferred from her real self to that old ideal picture of herself which he had drawn in the dream-like past. This was what she would have said. This was what she was always preaching to us. And we generally found it best in our neighbourhood to give Her Most Gracious Majesty her own way ; so that this theory, as regarded the conjugal relations of nearly everybody we knew, was supposed to be strictly accurate. At least, nobody had the temerity to question it.

“Lady Sylvia,” said this very person, “why don't you ever go up to London ? Mr. Balfour must think he is a bachelor again when he is all by himself in Piccadilly.”

“I don't like London much,” said Lady Sylvia,

with great composure. "Besides, my husband is chiefly there on business matters; and I should only be in the way."

"But you take a great interest in politics," observed this monitress, who doubtless considered that she was administering some wholesome discipline.

"My wife may take some interest in politics," said Balfour, "but she has no great love for politicians. I confess they are not picturesque or interesting persons, as a rule. I am afraid their worldly wisdom—their callousness—is a trifle shocking."

"Well, at all events," said Our Most Gracious Lady—for she was determined to put in a little bit of remonstrance—though she would gravely have rebuked anybody else for daring to do so, "you have not much political work to distract your attention at present—Parliament not sitting—and all that excitement about a dissolution having passed away."

"My dear Mrs. —," said he, with a laugh, "now is the worst time of all; for a good many of us don't know whether we shall be in the next

Parliament, and we are trying what we can do to make our calling and election sure. It is a disagreeable business ; but necessary. To-morrow, for example, I am going to town to see two gentlemen about a Bill they propose I should introduce ; but I shall have to ask them first what is the betting about my being able to get into Parliament at all. My present constituents have proved very ungrateful, after the unfailing attention and courtesy I have lavished upon them."

Here the German ex-soldier burst into a great roar of laughter, as if there was anything amusing in a young man's throwing contumely on a number of persons who had done him the honour of returning him to the House of Commons.

But after all it was not our business at this little dinner-party to speculate on the hidden griefs that might accompany the outward good fortune of these two young people. We had more palpable trouble near at hand, as was revealed by an odd little accident that evening. Our hostess had a great affection for two boisterous young lads, who were the sons of the august little woman just referred to ; and she had invited them to come

into the dining-room after dessert. Surely a mother ought to teach these brats not to make remarks on what does not concern them? Now, as we were talking in an aimless fashion about the Ashantee War, the recent elections, and what not, a sudden sound outside stilled us into silence. It was the children of the church choir who had come up to sing us a Christmas carol; and the sound of their voices, outside in the still night, recalled many a vivid recollection, and awoke some strange fancies about the coming year. What were most of us thinking of then? This young ass of a boy all at once says, "Oh, Auntie Bell, where will you be next Christmas? And do they sing Christmas carols far away in America?" And Auntie Bell, being taken rather aback, said she did not know, and smiled; but the smile was not a glad one, for we knew that sudden tears had started to the soft and kindly eyes. We were not quite so happy as we went home that night. And when some one remarked to the mother of those boys—but there, it is no use remonstrating with women.

CHAPTER VI.

A CONFESSION.

ON the morning of his departure for London Balfour would take no notice of the marked disfavour with which Lady Sylvia regarded his setting out. It was hard on the poor child, no doubt, that he should leave her in the midst of these few Christmas holidays ; and all for the sake of some trumpery Parliamentary business. He might have remonstrated with her, it is true ; might have reminded her that she knew what his life must be when she married him ; might have recalled her own professions of extreme interest in public affairs ; might have asked her if a single day's absence—which he had tried to avert by a proposal which she had rejected—was, after all, such a desperate business. But no. He had no wish to gain an argumentative victory over his

beautiful young wife. He would allow her to cherish that consolatory sense of having been wronged. Nay more; since she had plainly chosen to live in a world apart from his, he would make her life there as happy as possible. And so, as he kissed her in bidding her good-bye, he said—

“By the way, Sylvia, I might as well go round by the Hall, and see your father. If he is in all that trouble—this is Christmas-time you know—perhaps he will let me help him.”

Well, she did look a little grateful.

“And I shall be down as soon as I can to-morrow forenoon,” he added.

But as he drove away from The Lilacs in the direction of Willowby Hall, he did not at all feel so amiably disposed towards his wife’s father; whom he conjectured—and conjectured quite wrongly—to have been secretly soliciting this help from Lady Sylvia. But at all events, Balfour said to himself, the relations between himself and his wife were of more importance than his opinion of Lord Willowby. The sacrifice of a few thousand pounds was not of much concern to him; it

was of great concern to him that his wife should not remain unhappy if this matter of money could restore her usual cheerfulness.

When he reached the Hall, he found that Major and Mrs. Blythe had left the day before, but would return for Christmas. Lord Willowby was smoking an after-breakfast cigarette in the library. He looked surprised when Balfour entered; his son-in-law had not often paid him a visit unaccompanied by Lady Sylvia.

"The fact is," said Balfour, coming straight to the point, "Sylvia is rather distressed at present because she imagines you are in some trouble about business matters. She thinks I ought to ask you about it, and see if I can help you. Well, I don't like interfering in any one's affairs, especially when I have not been solicited to interfere; but really, you know, if I can be of service to you——"

"Ah! the good girl—the dear girl!" said Lord Willowby, with that effusiveness of tone that his daughter had learned to love as the only true expression of affection. "I can see it all! Her tender instinct told her who that man was whom

you drove over the day before yesterday—she recognized my despair, my shame, at being so beset by a leech, a blood-sucker, a miserable wretch who has no more sense of honour——”

And at this point Lord Willowby thought fit to get into a hot and indignant rage, which in no measure imposed on his son-in-law. Balfour waited patiently until the outburst was over. Perhaps he may have been employing his leisure considering how a man could be beset by a leech ; but inadvertently he looked out of window at his horses, and then he thought of his train.

“ And, indeed, Balfour,” said his lordship, altering his tone and appealing in a personal and plaintive way to his son-in-law, “ how could I speak to you about these matters? All your life you have been too well off to know anything about the shifts that other men have sometimes to adopt.”

“ My dear Lord Willowby,” said Balfour with a smile, “ I am afraid it is those very shifts that have led you into your present troubles.”

“ If you only knew—if you only knew,” said the other, shaking his head. “ But there ; as my

dear girl is anxious, I may as well make a clean breast of it. Will you sit down?"

Balfour sat down; he was thinking more of the train than of his father-in-law's affairs.

"Do you know," said Lord Willowby, with something of a pathetic air, "that you are about the last man in the world to whom I should like to reveal the cause of my present anxieties? You are—you will forgive me for saying so—apt to be harsh in your judgments; you do not know what temptations poverty puts before you. But my dear girl must plead for me."

Balfour, who did not at all like this abject tone, merely waited in mute attention. If this revelation was to be protracted, he would have to take a later train.

"About a year and a-half ago," said his lordship, letting his eyes rest vaguely on the arm of Balfour's easy-chair, "things had gone very badly with me, and I was easily induced into joining a speculation, or rather a series of speculations, on the Stock Exchange, which had been projected by several friends of mine who had been with me in other undertakings. They were rich men, and

could have borne their previous losses ; I was a poor man, and—and in short, desperate. Moreover, they were all business men, one or two of them merchants whose names are known all over the world ; and I had a fair right to trust to their prudence—had I not ? ”

“ Prudence is not of much avail in gambling,” said Balfour. “ However, how did you succeed ? ”

“ Our operations, which they conducted, mind you, were certainly on a large scale—an enormous scale. If they had come out successfully, I should never have touched a company, or a share, or a bond for the rest of my life. But instead of that, everything went against us ; and while one or two of us could have borne the loss, others of us must have been simply ruined. Well, it occurred to one or two of these persons—I must beg you to believe, Balfour, that the suggestion did not come from me—that we might induce our broker, by promises of what we should do for him afterwards, to assume the responsibility of these purchases and become bankrupt——”

A sudden look of wonder—merely of wonder,

not yet of indignation—leapt to the younger man's face.

“My dear fellow,” pleaded Lord Willowby, who had been watching for this look, “don't be too rash in condemning us—in condemning me, at all events. I assure you I at once opposed this plan when it was suggested. But they had a great many reasons to advance against mine. It was making one man bankrupt, instead of several. Then on whom would the losses fall? Why, on the jobbers; who are the real gamblers of the Stock Exchange, and who can easily suffer a few losses when pitted against their enormous gains——”

“But how was it possible?” exclaimed Balfour, who had not yet recovered from his amazement. “Surely the jobbers could have appealed to the man's books, in which all your names would have been found!”

“I assure you, Balfour,” said his lordship, with a look of earnest sincerity, “that so much was I opposed to the scheme that I don't know how that difficulty was avoided. Perhaps he had a new set of books prepared, and burned the old

ones. Perhaps he had from the outset been induced to enter his own name as the purchaser of the various stocks."

"But that would have been worse and worse—a downright conspiracy to swindle from the very beginning! Why, Lord Willowby, you don't mean to say that you allowed yourself to be associated with such a——well, perhaps I had better not give it a name!"

"My dear Balfour," said his lordship, returning to his pathetic tone, "it is well for you that you have never suffered from the temptations of poverty. I feared your judgment of my conduct would be harsh. You see, you don't think of the extenuating circumstances. I knew nothing of this plan when I went into the copartnership of speculation—I cannot even say that it existed. Very well: when my partners came to me and showed me a scheme that would save them from ruin, was I openly to denounce and betray them merely because my own conscience did not exactly approve of the means they were adopting?"

"To condone a felony—even with the purest and highest motives"—said Balfour; and with

that Lord Willowby suddenly rose from his chair. That single phrase had touched him into reality.

“Look here, Balfour——” said he, angrily.

But the younger man went on with great calmness, to explain that he had probably been too hasty in using these words before hearing the whole story. He begged Lord Willowby to regard him, Balfour, as one of the public: what would the public, knowing nothing of Lord Willowby’s private character, think of the whole transaction? And then he prayed to be allowed to know how the affair had ended.

“I wish it *was* ended,” said Lord Willowby, subsiding into his chair again, and into his customary gloomy expression. “This man appears to consider us as being quite at his mercy. They have given him more money than ever they promised; yet he is not satisfied. He knows quite well that the jobbers suspected what was the cause of his bankruptcy, though they could do nothing to him; now he threatens to disclose the whole business, and set them on us. He says he is ruined as far as is practicable; and that if

we don't give him enough to retire on, and live at his ease, he will ruin every one of us in public reputation. Now do you see how the case stands?"

He saw very clearly. He saw that he dared not explain to his wife the story he had been told; and he knew she would never be satisfied until he had advanced money in order to hush up a gigantic fraud. What he thought of this dilemma can easily be surmised; what he said about it was simply nothing at all.

"And why should he come at me?" said Lord Willowby, in an injured way. "I have no money. When he was down here the day before yesterday he used the plainest threats. But what can I do?"

"Prosecute him for attempting to obtain money by threats."

"But then the whole story would come out."

"Why not—if you can clear yourself of all complicity in the matter?"

Surely this was plain, obvious good sense. But Lord Willowby had always taken this young man to be a person of poor imagination, limited

sympathies, and cold practical ways. It was all very well for him to think that the case lay in a nutshell. He knew better. He had a sentiment of honour. He would not betray his companions. In order to revenge himself on this wretched worm of a bloodsucker, would he stoop to become an informer, and damage the fair reputations of friends of his who had done their best to retrieve his fallen fortunes?

He did not frankly say all this; but he hinted at something of it.

“Your generosity,” said Balfour, apparently with no intention of sarcasm, “may be very noble; but let us see exactly what it may lead to. What does this man propose to do, if he is not paid sufficient money?”

“Oh, he threatens everything—to bring an action against us—to give the jobbers information which will enable them to bring an action—and so forth.”

“Then your friends, at all events, will have to pay a large sum; and both you and they will be ruined in character. That is so—isn’t it?”

“I don’t know about character,” said this poor

hunted creature. "I think I could make some defence about that."

"I don't think your defence would affect the public verdict," said this blunt-spoken son-in-law.

"Well, be it so!" said his lordship, in desperation. "Let us say that the general voice of business-men—who, of course, never employ any stratagems to get out of predicaments in their own affairs—will say that we conspired to commit a fraud. Is that plain enough language? And now perhaps you will say that the threat is not a sufficiently serious one?"

"I will say nothing of the kind," said Balfour, quietly. "The whole case seems much more serious than any one could have imagined. Of course if you believe you could clear yourself, I say again, as I said before—Bring an action against the man, and have the whole thing out, whoever suffers. If you are disinclined to take that course——"

"Well, suppose I am?"

"In that case," said Balfour, rising, "will you give me a day or two to think over the affair?"

"Certainly; as many as you like," said Lord

Willowby, who had never expected much from the generosity of this son-in-law of his.

And so Balfour got into his trap again, and drove on to the station. Nothing that had happened to him since his marriage had disturbed him so much as the revelation of this story. He had always had a certain nameless, indefinable dislike to Lord Willowby; but he had never suspected him capable of conduct calculated to bring dishonour on the family name. And oddly enough, in this emergency, his greatest apprehension was that he might not be able to conceal the almost inevitable public scandal from Lady Sylvia. She had always loved her father. She had believed in his redundant expressions of affection. In the event of this great scandal coming to her ears, would she not indignantly repudiate it, and challenge her husband to repudiate it also?

That evening, by appointment, Balfour's two friends dined with him at his club; and they had a more or less discursive chat over the Bill which it was proposed he should introduce in the case of his being re-seated at the following General

Election. Strangely enough, he did not enter into this talk with any particular zest. He seemed abstracted, absorbed; several times he vaguely assented to an opinion which he found it necessary to dispute directly afterwards. For what the member of Ballinascroon was really saying to himself was this—"To-morrow I go down again to the country. My wife will want to know what I am going to do about her father's affairs. I shall be thrown a good deal during the next few days into the society of Lord Willowby and his brother. And on Christmas-day I shall have the singular felicity of dining in the company of two of the most promising scoundrels in this country."

CHAPTER VII.

CHRISTMAS SENTIMENT.

THERE is no saying what a man, even of the strictest virtue, will do for the sake of his wife. But, curiously enough, when Hugh Balfour found himself confronted by these two disagreeable demands—that he should lend or give a sum to Lord Willowby in order that a very disgraceful transaction should be hushed up ; and that he should dine on Christmas evening with that peer of doubtful morals and his still more disreputable brother—he found far more difficulty in assenting to the latter than to the former proposition. That was a matter of a few moments—the writing a few figures on a check ; this was spending a whole evening, and Christmas evening too, in the company of people whom he despised and detested. But what will not a man do for his wife ?

Either concession was a sufficiently bitter draught to drink. He had always been keenly scrupulous about money-matters ; and impatiently harsh and contemptuous in his judgment of those who were otherwise. He had formed a pronounced antipathy against Lord Willowby ; and a man does not care to strain his conscience or modify his creed for a person whom he dislikes. Then, there was a possibility of a public disclosure, which would probably reveal the fact that he had lent Lord Willowby this money. Could he defend himself by saying that he had counselled Lord Willowby, before lending him the money, to go into court and clear himself ! He would not do that. When he gave that advice, with mock humility, he knew perfectly that Lord Willowby was only prevaricating. He knew that this precious father-in-law of his was hopelessly entangled in a fraud which he had either concocted or condoned. If this money were to be lent at all, it was frankly to be lent in order that the man who threatened to inform should be bought over to hold his peace. But then what is it that a young and devoted husband will not do for his wife ?

Moreover, the more distressing of the two demands had to be met first. Lord Willowby told him that his partners in that scheme of cheating the jobbers had resolved to meet on the first of the new year, to consider what was to be done ! so that in the mean time Balfour could allow his conscience to rest so far as the money was concerned. But in the mean time came Christmas ; and he told his wife that he had no objection to joining that family party at the Hall. When he said that he had no objection, he meant that he had about twenty dozen, which he would overrule for her sake. And indeed Lady Sylvia's delight at his consent was beautiful to see. She spent day after day in decorating Willowby Hall with evergreens ; she did not altogether neglect The Lilacs, but then, you see, there was to be no Christmas party there. She sang at her work ; she was as busy as she could be ; she even wished—in the fulness of her heart—that her cousin Honoria were already arrived to help her. And Balfour ? Did he assist in that pretty and idyllic pastime ? Oddly enough, he seemed to take a greater interest than ever in the Von Rosens, and

some neighbours of theirs. He was constantly over among us; and that indefatigable and busy idler, the German ex-lieutenant, and he were to be seen every day starting off on some new business—a walking-match, a run with the Thistle-whippers, a sale of hay belonging to the Railway—in fact, anything that did not lead those two in the direction of Willowby Hall. On one occasion he suddenly said to our Queen T——

“Don’t you think Christmas is a terribly dull business?”

“We don’t find it so,” said that smiling person; “we find it terribly noisy—enough to ruin one’s nerves for a week.”

“Ah,” said he, “that is quite different. I can understand your enjoying Christmas when you have a children’s party to occupy the evening.”

“I am sure,” said our Sovereign Mistress, who, to do her justice, is always ready with little kindnesses, “I am quite sure we should all be so glad if you and Lady Sylvia would come over and spend the evening with us—we would make Lady Sylvia the presiding fairy to distribute the

gifts from the Christmas tree—it is the most splendid one we have ever had——”

“You are very kind,” said he, with a sigh. “I wish I could. There is other joy in store for me. I have to dine with some of my father-in-law’s relatives ; and we shall have an evening devoted to bad wine and the Tichborne case.”

And at length Christmas-day came round ; and then it appeared that Mr. Balfour was expected to go from church to Willowby Hall and remain there until the evening. This, he considered, was not in the bond. He had managed to make the acquaintance of a certain clergyman in the neighbourhood of Englebury : and this worthy person had just forwarded him the proof-sheets of an essay on some public question or other, with a meek request that Mr. Balfour would glance over it and say whether the case of the enemy had been fairly and fully stated. This was courageous and honest on the part of the parson ; for Mr. Balfour was on the side of the enemy. Now as this article was to be published in a monthly magazine, was it not of great importance that the answer should be returned at once ? If Lady Sylvia would go on to

the Hall with her papa, he, Balfour, would return to The Lilacs, get this bit of business over, and join the gay family party in the evening. Lady Sylvia seemed rather disappointed that this clergyman should have deprived her husband of the pleasure of spending the whole day in the society of her relatives ; but she consented to the arrangement, and Balfour, with much content, spent Christmas-day by himself.

And then, in the hush of the still and sacred evening, this happy family party met round the Christmas-board. It was a pleasant picture—for the bare dining-room looked no longer bare, when it was laden with scarlet berries and green leaves, and Lord Willowby could not protest against a waste of candles on such a night. Then, with his beautiful young wife presiding at the head of the table—herself the perfect type of gentle English womanhood—and Honoria Blythe's merry black eyes doing their very best to fascinate and entertain him, why should this ungrateful Scotch boor have resolved to play the part of Apemantus? Of course, he was outwardly very civil—nay, formally courteous ; but there was an air of

isolation about him, as if he were sitting there by an exercise of constraint. He rarely took wine anywhere ; when he did, he almost never noticed what he drank : why was it, therefore, that he now tasted everything, and put the glass down as if he were calculating whether sudden death might not ensue ? And when Major Blythe, after talking very loudly for some time, mentioned the word "Tichborne," why should this young man ejaculate—apparently to himself—"O good Lord !" in a tone that somehow or other produced a dead silence.

"Perhaps it is no matter of concern to you," said Major Blythe, with as much ferocity as he dared to assume towards a man who might possibly lend him money, "that an innocent person should be so brutally treated ?"

"Not much," said Balfour, humbly.

"I dare say you have not followed the case very closely, Balfour," said his lordship, intervening to prevent a dispute.

"No, I have not," he said. "In fact, I would much rather walk the other way. But then," he added to Miss Honoria, who was seated by him,

“your papa must not imagine that I have not an opinion as to who the Claimant really is.”

“No!” exclaimed Honoria, with her splendid eyes full of theatrical interest. “Who is he, then?”

“I discovered the secret from the very beginning. The old prophecies have been fulfilled. The ravens have flown away. Frederick Barbarossa has come back to the world at last.”

“Frederick Barbarossa?” said Miss Honoria, doubtfully.

“Yes,” continued her instructor, seriously. “His other name was O'Donovan. He was a Fenian leader.”

“Susan,” called out her brat of a brother, “he’s only making a fool of you”—but at any rate the sorry jest managed to stave off for a time the inevitable fight about the fat person from the colonies.

It was a happy family gathering. Balfour was so pleased to see a number of relatives enjoying themselves together in this manner that he would not for the world have the party split itself into two after dinner. Remain to drink Madeira when

the ladies were going to sing their pious Christmas hymns in the other room? Never! Major Blythe said by Gad he wasn't going into the drawing-room just yet; and poor Lord Willowby looked helplessly at both, not knowing which to yield to. Naturally, his duties as host prevailed. He sat down with his brother, and offered him some Madeira, which, to tell the truth, was very good indeed, for Lord Willowby was one of the men who think they can condone the poisoning of their guests during dinner by giving them a decent glass of wine afterwards. Balfour went into the drawing-room, and sat down by his wife, Honoria having at her request gone to the piano.

"Why don't you stay in the dining-room, Hugh?" said she.

"Ah," said he, with a sigh, "Christmas evenings are far too short for the joy they contain. I did not wish the happiness of this family gathering to be too much flavoured with Tichborne. What is your cousin going to sing now——"

*O, how sweet it is to see,
Brethren dwell in enmity!*

or some such thing?"

She was hurt and offended. He had no right to scoff at her relatives ; because if there was any discordant element in that gathering it was himself. They were civil enough to him. They were not quarrelling among themselves. If there was any interference with the thoughts and feelings appropriate to Christmas, he was the evil spirit who was disturbing the emotions of those pious souls.

Indeed, she did not know what demon had got possession of him. He went over to Mrs. Blythe, a woman whom she knew he heartily disliked, and sat down by that majestic three-decker, and paid her great and respectful attention. He praised Honoria's playing. He asked to what college they meant to send Johnny, when that promising youth left school. He was glad to see the Major looking so well and hearty ; did he take his morning ride in the park yet ? Mrs. Blythe, who was a dull woman, nevertheless had her suspicions ; but how could she fail to be civil to a gentleman who was complaisance personified ?

His spirits grew brighter and brighter ; he was quite friendly with Lord Willowby and his

younger brother when they came in from the dining-room. Lady Sylvia deeply resented this courtesy, because she thought it arose from a sarcastic appreciation of the incongruity of his presence there; whereas it was merely the result of a consciousness that the hour of his release was at hand. He had done his duty. He had sacrificed his own likings for the sake of his wife. He had got through this distasteful dinner; and now he was going back to a snug room at The Lilacs, to a warm fire, an easy-chair, a pipe, and a friendly chat.

But who can describe the astonishment of these simple folks when a servant came in to say that Mr. Balfour's carriage was at the door? Only ten o'clock—and this Christmas night!

"Surely there is some mistake, Hugh?" said his young wife, looking at him with great surprise. "You don't wish to go home now?"

"Oh, yes, child," said he, gravely. "I don't want to have you knocked up. It has been a long day for you to-day."

She said not another word; but got up, and went to the door.

"Come, Sylvia," said her father, who had opened the door for her, "you must give us another hour, anyway: you are not very tired? Shall I tell him to take the horses out again?"

"No, thank you," said she, coldly. "I think I will go now."

"I am sorry," said Balfour, when she had gone, "to break up your charming Christmas party; but the fact is, Sylvia has been very fatigued ever since she put up those evergreens; and I am rather afraid of the night air for her."

He did not explain what was the difference between the night air of ten o'clock and the night air of eleven o'clock; for presently Lady Sylvia came downstairs again, wrapped up in furs; and she was escorted out to the carriage with great ceremony by her father. She was silent for a time after they drove away.

"Hugh," she said, abruptly, by-and-by, "why do you dislike my relatives so? And if you do dislike them, I think you might try to conceal it, for my sake."

"Well," said he, "I do think that is rather ungrateful. I thought I went out of my way to

be civil to them all round to-night. I think I was most tremendously civil. What was it, then, that displeased you?"

She did not answer; she was oppressed by bitter thoughts. And when he tried to coax her into conversation, she replied in monosyllables. In this manner they reached The Lilacs.

Now before leaving home that evening he had given private instructions that a pretty little supper was to be prepared for their return; and when Lady Sylvia entered she found the dining-room all cheerfully lit up, a fire blazing, and actual oysters (oysters don't grow on the hedge-rows of Surrey, as some of us know) on the table. This was how he thought he and she might spend their first Christmas evening together, late as the hour was; and he hastened to anticipate even the diligent Anne in helping his wife to get rid of her furs.

"Now, Syllabus," said he, "come in and make yourself comfortable."

"Thank you," said she, "I am a little tired; I think I will go upstairs now."

"Won't you come down again?"

“I think not.”

And so, without any great sense of injury, and forgetting altogether the supper that was spread out on the table, he shut himself up alone in the still dining-room, and lit his pipe, and took down a book from the library. Soon enough these temporary disappointments were forgotten ; for it was a volume of Keats he had taken down at haphazard, and how could a man care about what happened to him on the first Christmas evening of his married life, if he was away in the dreamland of “Endymion,” and removed from mortal cares ?

Major Blythe and his family remained at Willowby Hall for some few days ; Lady Sylvia never went near them. Nay, she would not allow the name of one of her relations to pass her lips. If her husband mentioned any one of them, she changed the conversation ; and once, when he proposed to drive over to the Hall, she refused to go.

On the other hand, she endeavoured to talk politics to her husband—in a stiff and forced way, which only served to distress him. He remonstrated

with her gently—for, indeed, he was rather disappointed that his honest endeavours to please her had borne so little fruit—but she only grew more reserved in tone. And he could not understand why she should torture herself by this compulsory conversation about politics, foreign and domestic, when he saw clearly that her detestation of everything connected with his public life increased day by day, until—merely to save her pain—he could have wished that there was no such place as Englebury on the map of England.

He told her he had spoken to her father about these pecuniary troubles, and offered to assist him. She said that was very kind, and even kissed him on the forehead, as she happened to be passing his chair; but not even that would induce her to talk about her father or anything belonging to him. “And, indeed, he himself could not be very explicit on the point, more especially as everything now pointed to his having to lend Lord Willowby money, not to hush up a fraud, but to defend a criminal prosecution.

About the third week in January, all England was startled by the announcement that there was

to be an immediate dissolution of Parliament, and that a General Election would shortly follow. Balfour did not seem so perturbed as might have been expected; he even appeared to find some sense of relief in the sudden news. He at once grew active, bright, eager, and full of a hundred schemes, and the first thing he did was, of course, to rush up to London, the centre of all the hurry and disturbance that prevailed. Lady Sylvia naturally remained in Surrey; he never thought for a moment of dragging her into that turmoil.

CHAPTER VIII.

VICTORY !

THERE was not a moment to lose. All England was in confusion ; local committees hastily assembling ; Parliamentary agents down in Westminster wasting their substance on shilling telegrams ; wire-pullers in Pall Mall pitifully begging for money to start hopeless contests in the interest of the party ; eager young men fresh from college consulting their friends as to which impregnable seat they should assault with a despairing courage ; and comfortable and elderly members dolefully shaking their heads over the possible consequences of this precipitate step, insomuch that the luncheon-claret at their club had no longer any charms for them. And then the voluble partisans—the enthusiasts—the believers in the great liberal heart of England—how little did

they reckon of the awful catastrophe impending! The abolition of the Income tax would rally wavering constituencies. The recent reverses at the poll were only the result of a temporary irritation; another week would give the Government an overwhelming majority. Alas! alas! These confident professions were balm to many an anxious heart, this or the other luckless wight seeking all possible means of convincing himself that his constituents could not be so cruel as to oust him; but they did not prevent those constituents from arising and slaying their representative, transforming him from a living and moving member of Parliament into a wandering and disconsolate voice.

Balfour had to act and think for himself in this crisis; Mr. Bolitho was far too busy to attend to such a paltry place as Englebury, even if he had been willing to join in what he regarded as a Quixotic adventure. And now a strange thing happened. Balfour had long been of opinion that his wife's notions of what public life should be were much too romantic and high-strung to be practicable. It was well she should have them;

it was well that her ignorance of the world allowed her to imagine them to be possible. But, of course, a man living in the denser and coarser atmosphere of politics had to take human nature as he found it; and could not afford to rule his conduct by certain theories which, beautiful enough in themselves, were merely visionary.

Oddly enough, however, and probably unconsciously, he did at this moment rule his conduct by Lady Sylvia's sentiments. It is true that, when he first talked about that business of buying the filched common from Mr. Chorley, and subsequently presenting it to the Englebury people, he appeared to treat the whole affair as a joke; but all the same he had expressed no distinct disapproval of the scheme. It was only after Lady Sylvia's indignant protest that he came to consider that proposal as altogether detestable. Further, when Bolitho suggested to him that he should try to oust the member then sitting for Englebury, he saw no reason why he should not try to do so. Had not Harnden himself led similar assaults on seats deemed even more a personal perquisite than his own? Harnden was used up,

was of no good to either party, had spoken of retiring; why should not the seat be contested? This was Balfour's opinion at the time; and he himself could not have told when he had altered it. All the same, as he now hurried up to London, he felt it would be mean to try to oust this old gentleman from his seat; if Harnden did not mean to resign, he, Balfour, would make a rush at some other place—Evesham, Shoreham, Woodstock, any quarter, in fact, that was likely to covet the glory of returning so distinguished and independent a person as himself.

And in his straightforward fashion he went direct to this old gentleman, whom he found in a little and old-fashioned, but famous club in St. James's Street. The member for Englebury had once been a fine-looking man; and even now there was something striking about the firm mouth, aquiline nose, keen eyes, fresh colour, and silvery hair; but the tall form was bent almost double; and the voice was querulous and raucous. He came into the small side-room with Balfour's card in his hand; he bowed slightly and stiffly; and in that second had keenly studied his

adversary's face, as if he would read every line of the character impressed on it.

"Sit down," said he.

Balfour sat down, and appeared to consider for a second or so how he would open the conversation. The two were familiar with each other's appearance in the House; but had never spoken.

"I suppose you know, Mr. Harnden, that they mean to turn me out of Ballinascreen?"

"Yes, I do—yes," said the old gentleman, in a staccato fashion. "And you want to turn me out of Englebury? Yes—I have heard that too."

"I thought of trying," said Balfour, frankly. "But now I have made up my mind not to stand unless there is a vacancy. There was a talk of your resigning. I have called now to ask you whether there was any truth in the rumour; if not, I will let Englebury alone."

"Ay," said the elder man, with gruff emphasis—"Chorley—that fool Chorley—told you, didn't he? You are in league with Chorley, aren't you? Do you think that fellow can get my seat for you?"

"I tell you I don't mean to try, sir, unless you

intend to give it up of your own free will. Chorley? Oh, no; I am not in league with Chorley; he and I had a quarrel."

"I didn't hear about that," said the old gentleman, still regarding his enemy with some reserve. "I haven't been down there for a long time now. And so Chorley was humbugging you, was he? You thought he had put you in for a good thing, eh? Don't you believe that ass. Why, he made some representations to me some time ago——"

At this point Mr. Harnden suddenly stopped, as if some new light had struck him.

"Ha, that was it, was it? You quarrelled with him, did you?" he said, glancing at Balfour a quick, shrewd look.

"Yes, I did," said Balfour, "and I swore I would fight him, and you, and everybody all round, and win the seat in spite of any coalition. That was vapouring. I was in a rage."

Mr. Harnden stroked his hands on his knees for some little time, and then he laughed and looked up.

"I believe what you have told me," he said, staring his enemy full in the face. "I see now

why that presumptuous fellow, Chorley, made overtures to me. To tell you the truth I thought he wanted me to spend more money, or something of that sort, and I sent him about his business. Well, sir, you've done the best thing you could have thought of by coming straight to me. I will tell you a secret. I had prepared a nice little plan for dishing both you and Chorley."

And here the old gentleman laughed again, at his own smartness. Balfour was glad to find him in this pleasant humour; it was not every one, if all stories be true, that the member for Englebury received so pleasantly.

"I like the look of you," said Mr. Harnden, bluntly. "I don't think you would play any tricks."

"I am very much obliged to you," said Balfour, drily.

"Oh, don't you be insulted. I am an old man: I speak my mind. And when you come to my time of life—well, you'll know more about electioneering dodges. So you've quarrelled with Chorley, have you?"

"Yes."

"H'm. And you believed he would have given you my seat?"

"I thought with his help I might have won it—that is if his representations were true. I was told you weren't very popular down there, Mr. Harnden."

"Perhaps not—perhaps not," said the old man. "They grumble because I speak the truth in Parliament and out. But don't you make any mistake about it; all that would disappear if another man were to contest the seat. They'll stick to me at an election; depend on that, sir."

"Then you propose to remain in Parliament," said Balfour, rising. "In that case, I need not waste your time further."

"Stay a minute," said the old man, curtly. "I told you I meant to dish you and Chorley."

"Yes."

"You and I might dish Chorley, and you might have the seat."

Balfour was not an emotional person; but he was a young man, and desperately anxious about his chances of being returned; and at this abrupt proposal his heart jumped.

“There is something about that fellow that acts on me like a red rag on a bull,” continued this irascible old man. “He is as cunning as a fox, and as slippery as an eel; and his infernal twaddle about the duties of a member of Parliament—and his infernal wife too! Look here; you are a young man; you have plenty of energy. Go down at once to Englebury; issue an address; pitch it high and strong about corrupt local influence and intimidation; denounce that fellow, and call on the electors to free themselves from the tyranny of dictation—you know the sort of bunkum. That will drive Chorley over to me.”

“You are excessively kind, sir,” said Balfour, who, despite his disappointment, could not help bursting out into a laugh. “I have no doubt that would be excellent sport for you. But, you see, I want to get into Parliament. I can’t go skylarking about Englebury, merely to make a fool of Mr. Chorley.”

“There’s a good deal of the greenhorn about you,” said the old gentleman, testily, for he did not like being laughed at, “but that is natural at your age. Of course, I mean to resign. I

had thought of resigning in favour of that boy of Lord S——'s, who is a clever lad, if he would give up French Radicals and atheism. But I will resign in your favour, if you like—at the last moment—after Chorley has been working for me like the hound he is. And what do you say to that, young man?"

Mr. Harnden rose, with a proud smile on his face. He was vain of his diplomacy; perhaps, too, it pleased him to patronize this younger man, to whom a seat in the House was of such infinite consequence.

"Do I understand, sir, that you meant to give up your seat in any case?" Balfour asked.

"Certainly I did," said the other. "If I wished to retain it, do you think I should be afraid of you—I mean of any candidate that Chorley could bring forward? No, no; don't you believe any such stuff. The people of Englebury and I have had our quarrels; but we are good friends at bottom. It will be a very disgraceful thing if they don't give me a handsome piece of plate when I retire."

“My dear sir,” said Balfour, with saturnine simplicity, “I will take care of that.”

“And I am not going to spend a penny in a bogus contest; mind that. But that is not your business. Now go away. Don’t tell anybody you have seen me. I like the look of you; I think you have too many opinions; but as soon as you get into some small office—and the Government might do worse, I will say—you will get cured of that. Good-day to you.”

There is a telegraph office at the foot of St. James’s Street. Balfour walked right down there, and sent a message to his friend Jewsbury at Oxford:—“*Come down at once to the ‘Green Fox,’ Englebury. Some fun going on.*” Then, finding he could just catch the afternoon train, he jumped into a Hansom and drove to Paddington Station. He arrived at Englebury without even a tooth-brush; but he had his cheque-book in his pocket.

The Rev. Mr. Jewsbury arrived the next day; and the business of the election began at once. Jewsbury was in the secret, and roared with laughter as he heightened the pungency of the paragraphs which called on the electors of Engle-

bury to free themselves from political slavery. And Balfour laughed as heartily when he found himself lashed and torn to pieces every morning by the *Englebury Mercury* ; because he looked forward to the time when the editor of that important organ might have to change his tune, in asking the sitting member to obtain the Government advertisements for him.

It was a fierce fight to be sure ; and Mr. and Mrs. Chorley had such faith in their time-honoured representative that they called on their fellow-townsmen to raise a sum to defray Mr. Harnden's expenses. Then, on the night before the election, the thunderbolt fell. Mr. Harnden attended a meeting of his friends and supporters. He thanked them most cordially for all they had done on his behalf. The weight of years, he said, was beginning to tell on him ; nevertheless he had been loth to take his hand from the plough ; now, however, at the last moment, he felt it would be a mistake to task their kindness and forbearance longer. But he felt it a privilege to be able to resign in favour of an opponent who had throughout treated him with the greatest courtesy—an opponent who had

already made some mark in the House—who would do credit to the borough. That the constituency was not divided in its opinions they would prove by voting for Mr. Balfour like one man. He called for three cheers for his antagonist ; and the meeting, startled, bewildered, but at the same time vaguely enthusiastic, positively roared. Whether Mr. Chorley, who was on the platform, joined in that outburst, could not well be made out. Next day, as a matter of course, Mr. Hugh Balfour was elected member of Parliament for the borough of Englebury ; and he straightway telegraphed off this fact to his wife. Perhaps she was not looking at the newspapers.

Well, he was only a young man ; and he was no doubt proud of his success as he hastened down to Surrey again. Then everything promised him a glad home-coming ; for he had learned in passing through London that the charge against Lord Willowby and his fellow-speculators had been withdrawn—he supposed the richer merchants had joined to buy the man off. And as he drove over to The Lilacs he was full of eager schemes. Lady Sylvia would come at once to

London, and the house in Piccadilly would be got ready for the opening of Parliament. It would be complimentary if she went down with him to Englebury, and called on one or two people whose acquaintance he had made down there. Surely she would be glad to welcome him after his notable victory.

But what was his surprise and chagrin to find that Lady Sylvia's congratulations were of a distinctly formal and correct character; and that she did not at all enter into his plans for leaving The Lilacs.

"Why, Sylvia," said he, "surely you don't hate Englebury simply because you disliked the Chorleys? Chorley has been my sworn enemy all through this fight; and I have smote him hip and thigh!"

"I scarcely remember anything about the Chorleys," she said, indifferently.

"But why would you rather live down here?" said he, in amazement.

"You know you will be every night at the House," she said.

"Not more than other members," he remon-

strated. "I shall have three nights a week free."

"And then you will be going out among people who are altogether strangers to me—who will talk about things of which I know nothing——"

"My dear child," said he, "you don't mean to say you intend to live down here all by yourself during the time Parliament is sitting? You will go mad!"

"I have told you before, Hugh," said she, "that I cannot leave papa while he is so poorly as he is at present. You will have plenty of occupation and amusement in London without me; I must remain here."

There was a flash of angry light in the deep-set grey eyes.

"If you insist on remaining here," said he, "because your father chooses to go pottering about after those rabbits——"

Then he checked himself. Had he not vowed to himself again and again that he would be tenderly considerate to this gentle-souled creature, who had placed the happiness of her life in his hands? If she had higher notions of duty than

he could very well understand, ought he not at least to respect them ?

“ Ah, well, Sylvia,” said he, patting her on the shoulder, “ perhaps you are right. But I am afraid you will find it very dull.”

CHAPTER IX.

THE CRISIS.

THINGS had indeed "come to a bonny cripus;" and he was altogether unaware of it. He was vaguely conscious, it is true, that his married life was not the married life he had looked forward to; and he was sorry that Lady Sylvia should insist on moping herself to death in that solitary house in Surrey. But then if her sense of duty to her ailing father demanded the sacrifice, he could not interfere; and there was some compensation for her in the beauty of the summer months that were now filling her garden with flowers. As for himself, he let no opportunity slip of paying her small and kindly attentions. He wrote to her every day. When he happened to have an idle forenoon, he would stroll into Christie's and buy some nick-nack for her. Lady

Sylvia had never had the chance of gratifying her womanly passion for old china; but now that Balfour had discovered her weakness for such things, she had them in abundance. Now it was a Dresden milk-jug, now a couple of Creil plates, again a Sèvres jardinière, that was sent as a little token of remembrance; while he scarcely ever went down on Saturday morning without carrying with him some similar bit of frail treasure, glad that he knew of something that would interest her. In the mean time he was intensely busy with his Parliamentary work; for, not having been in office, and having no hope of office, the tremendous overthrow of his party at the General Election had in no way damped his eager energy.

When the blow fell, it found him quite unprepared. One afternoon he received a telegram from his wife asking him if he could go down that evening. It was a most unusual summons; for she was scrupulously careful not to interfere with his Parliamentary duties; but of course he immediately hastened down to The Lilacs. He was more surprised than alarmed.

He went into the drawing-room, and found his wife standing there, alone. The light of the summer evening was somewhat dimmed by the multitude of leaves about the verandah: but his first glance told him that she was deadly pale, and he saw that she was apparently supporting herself by the one hand that caught the edge of the table.

“Sylvia,” said he, in dismay, “what is the matter?”

“I am sorry to have troubled you to come down,” she said, in a voice that was strangely calm, “but I could bear this no longer. I think it is better that we two should separate.”

He did not quite understand at first; he only felt a little cold about the heart. The next moment she would have fallen backwards had he not caught her; but she quickly recovered herself, and then gently put his hands away from her.

“Sylvia,” said he, again, “what is the matter with you?”

He stared at the white face as if it were that of a mad woman.

“I mean what I say, Hugh,” she answered.

“I have thought it over for months back. It is no hasty wish or resolve.”

“Sylvia, you must be out of your senses,” he exclaimed. “To separate! Why? For what reason? Is it anything that I have done?”

He wished to take her hand; she withdrew a step.

“The sooner this pain is over the better for both of us,” she said, and again the trembling hand sought the support of the table. “We have been separated—we are separated now—except in name. Our married life has been a mistake—I do not think it is either your fault or mine—but the punishment is more than I can bear. I cannot any longer suffer this—this pretence. Let us separate. We shall both be free to live our own lives, without pretending to the world to be what we are not——”

“My darling!” he exclaimed—but somehow the warmth of his protest was chilled by that impassive demeanour; it was no outburst of temper that had summoned him down from London. “Sylvia! why won’t you tell me your reasons? What is it you want altered? I have tried in

every way to make your life just as you wished it——”

“I know you have,” she said ; “you have been kindness itself. But it is not a thing to be reasoned about. If you do not know already how far we are apart, how can I tell you? We ought never to have married. We have not a single thought or feeling, a single opinion, occupation, or interest in common. I have tried to bear it—God knows how I have tried, night and day, to school myself into believing that it was only the natural way of the world. I cannot believe it—I cannot believe that any other woman has suffered what I have suffered, and now I must speak. Your life is in your work. I am only an encumbrance to you—a something apart from yourself and your interests, that demands attentions which are paid by you as a duty. I wish to release you ; and to release myself from a life of hypocrisy which I cannot any longer bear. Have I said enough?”

He stood for a moment or two absolutely silent : he never forgot those moments during his life.

“You have said enough,” he answered, calmly ; and then he absently turned to the window.

The daylight was going ; the hush of the evening had fallen over the birds ; there was not a leaf stirring. " Yes, you have said enough. You cannot expect me to answer what you have said at once. Apparently you have been thinking about it for some time. I must think about it, too."

He took up his hat, which he had mechanically placed on the table beside him, and passed out into the garden. His face had a strange grey look on it ; the eyes were sunken and tired. Probably he himself scarcely knew that he opened the great wooden gate, went out into the road, and then by-and-by chose a familiar path across the fields, where he was not likely to meet any one. He did not seem to care whither his wandering steps led him. His head was bent down, and at first he walked slowly, with the gait of one who was infirm or ailing ; but presently he quickened his pace, his manner became more nervous and excited, occasionally he uttered a word as if he were addressing some one in an imaginary conversation.

The woods grew darker ; the first stars came

out. Far away there was the sound of a cart being driven home in the dusk ; but all around him was still.

Then he came to a stone bridge over a small river ; and here he paused for a time, leaning his arms on the parapet, and staring down—without seeing anything—at the black water. How could he see anything ? For the first time since he had reached manhood's estate, he was crying bitterly.

He was now a good many miles from home ; but his wanderings had brought him no relief. It was all a mystery to him ; he knew not what to do. How could he move by any piteous appeal that cold resolve ? It was no mere whim or fancy he had to deal with ; but something at once strong and subtle, a conviction of slow growth, a purpose that despair had rendered inflexible. But the origin of it ? His brain refused to act ; he wondered whether he, too, were going mad.

Now a short distance from this river there stood a house that he knew ; and as he aimlessly began to retrace his steps he passed the gate. There was a light burning in one of the rooms ; the window was open ; he heard a faint sound of music.

Suddenly it occurred to him—surely Lady Sylvia, before she had come to this terrible resolve, must have spoken, in however indirect a fashion, of her manner of life to some sympathetic woman friend ; and to whom more likely than this kind person for whom she had professed so great an admiration and love ? He went nearer to the house ; she was alone in the room, playing some sufficiently sorrowful melody to herself. In his desperation and bewilderment, he determined that he would demand the counsel of this kind friend, who would at least understand a woman's nature, even supposing that she was not in Lady Sylvia's confidence. He was too anxious and perturbed to think twice. He entered the house ; was at once shown into the drawing-room, and there and then told the whole story to his startled listener.

And it was with a great interest and sympathy that she heard the story, for she could not fail to observe that once or twice tears started to the young man's eyes as he tried to find some excuse in his own conduct for Lady Sylvia's resolve ; and, moreover, she had a great liking for the young wife whose griefs and troubles had just been revealed

to her. But what was the young man's surprise to find that this gentle and kindly lady, as he hurriedly told his brief story, began to grow monstrously angry; and when he had finished was quite wrathful and indignant. There were no tears in her eyes; but there were tears in her voice—of proud and pathetic remonstrance.

“The cause of it!” she exclaimed, with the beautiful dark eyes—it must be owned—a trifle moist. “If she had some real sorrow to think of, she would have no room in her head for these morbid notions. Look at the other young wife who is our neighbour—my greatest friend and companion—who has bravely made up her mind to go and live for a whole year in America without those young children that are the very life of her life. That is a trial—that is a sorrow that demands some sympathy; and if Lady Sylvia had some real grief of that kind to undergo, depend on it she would not be torturing herself and you with her imaginary disappointments. Her disappointments! What is the truth? She is too well off. She has been too carefully kept aside from any knowledge of the real misery that is in

the world. Her notion of human life is that it should become just what everybody wants it to be. And her cure for her fancied troubles is separation from her husband? Very well. Let her try it!"

And here, of course, she did cry a bit, as a woman must; but Balfour did not at all resent her angry vehemence, although it was far from complimentary to his young and unhappy wife.

"Yes," said she, with a passionate indignation, "let her try it! You cannot argue her out of her folly; let her have her will! Oh, I know the dreams that young girls have—and that is her excuse, that she has never known what life is. It is to be all rose-colour. Well, let her try her own remedy! Perhaps she would like to see what real trouble is—a young mother tearing herself away from her children and going to a distant country where she cannot hear for weeks if one of them were to die. I can tell you if she came with us it might be possible to show her something of what human beings have really to suffer in this world—the parting of emigrants from their

home and their kindred—the heartbreaking fight for money——”

“But why should she not go with you?” he said eagerly. “Do you mean that you are going with the Von Rosens?”

She paused; and the nimble wit within the beautiful little head was busy with its quick imaginings. She had not thought of this as a practical proposal when she held it out as a wild threat. But why not—why not? This woman was vehement in her friendships when they were once formed. What would she not do to purge the mind of this young wife of fancies begotten of indolence and too good fortune? There was some colour in her face. Her breath came and went a trifle quickly.

“Why not—to be sure?” said she; and she regarded the young man with a strange compassion in her eyes. “I do think if you trusted her to us for a time—if she would go with us, we could do her some good. I think we could show her some things. I think she might be glad enough to alter her decision—yes, glad enough!——”

“But a year is a long time,” said he, staring absently at the open window and the black night and the stars outside.

“But we are not going for a year,” said she—and it was clear that now she was most anxious to attempt this soul-cure. “We are only going to accompany our friends on their outward trip, and see them comfortably settled—comfortably, indeed! when that poor girl has to leave her children behind. If there was any righteousness in the law they would give her the land and the money at once, and pay no attention to that ridiculous will. Oh no, Mr. Balfour, we shall only be going for a three months’ trip or so; but we shall see many things in that time; and I think I could speak a little now and again to Lady Sylvia. Distance does a great deal. I don’t think she will be sorry when we turn and begin to get home again to England. I don’t think you will ever hear another word as long as you live about separation.”

His face had brightened wonderfully.

“Do you know what a great favour it is you are offering me?” he said.

“Oh, no, not at all,” said she eagerly. “We are going for a pleasure excursion. It is a mere holiday. We shall have a sharp wrench when we bid good-bye to the Von Rosens, but Lady Sylvia will have nothing to do with that. And she will see plenty to amuse her ; and the change will do her health good.”

Well, this young man was grateful enough to her ; but he was not at all aware of what she had done for his sake. What had become of all those pet theories of hers about the false ideals formed before marriage ; and of the inevitable disappointment on the discovery of the truth after marriage ? This—if the humiliating confession must be made to the indulgent reader—was the identical Surrey prophetess and seer who used to go about telling us that nearly everybody who was married was wretched. The man had dowered his sweetheart with qualities she never possessed ; after marriage he learned the nature of the woman who was to be his life-companion ; and never ceased to look back with an infinite longing and sadness to that imaginary woman with whom he had fallen in love. The girl, on the other hand, married her

lover with the notion that he was to be always heroic and her lover; whereas she woke up to find that she had only married a husband, who regarded her not as life itself, but as only one of the facts of life. These we knew to be her pet theories. When this young man came to tell her of his troubles, why did not this Frau Philosophin, as we called her, fall back on her favourite theories, as affording all the explanation that he needed? The fact is—though it requires a good deal of courage to put the words down—the heart of this person was much more trustworthy than her head. It was a very loveable and loving heart; answering quickly to any demand for sympathy; and most firmly tenacious of friendships. When she was told that Lady Sylvia was in trouble—when she saw that this young husband was in trouble—her fiddlestick theories went to the winds; and her true woman's heart gave prompt and sure answer. She was a little nettled and indignant, it is true; for she had had, for some evenings before, mysterious fits of crying in quiet corners of the house over this journey we were about to undertake; but her indignation had only made

her frank ; and she had spoken bravely and honestly to Hugh Balfour. Yes, he had more to thank her for than he imagined, though his gratitude was quite sufficiently sincere and warmly expressed.

The tender-hearted little woman held his hand for a moment at the door.

“ I shall not speak a word of this to any human being,” said she—just as if she had no husband to whom she had sworn allegiance—“ until you tell me that I may, and then I hope to hear that Lady Sylvia has accepted my offer. Don’t argue with her ; you might drive her into a sort of verbal obstinacy. Don’t ask her to change her decision ; she has not come to it without much heart-rending, and she cannot be expected to abandon it for the sake of a few sentences. Accept it ; the cure will be more permanent.”

“ Thank you, and God bless you,” said he, and then he disappeared in the night.

“ What if she should object ? ” he asked himself, as he hurried on through the darkness, his only guidance being from the stars. He had been so stunned and bewildered by the announcement

of her resolve, that he had never even thought of what she would do further—whether she would prefer to go back to Willowby Hall, or to remain in sole possession of The Lilacs. Either alternative seemed to him to be a sufficiently strange ending to the dreams that these two had dreamed together as they walked on that lonely terrace of a summer night, listening for the first notes of the nightingale, and watching the marshalling of the innumerable hosts of heaven. To go back to her father : to be left alone in that Surrey cottage.

He found her in the same room—calm, and apparently self-possessed ; but he saw from her eyes that she had given way to passionate grief in his absence.

“ Sylvia,” said he, “ if I thought you had sent for me from any hasty impulse, I should ask you to let me reason with you. I see it is not so. You have made up your mind ; and I must respect your wish. But I don’t want to have any public scandal attaching either to your name or mine ; and I believe—whether you believe it or not—that you will repent that decision. Now I am going to ask a favour of you. The ——s mean to

accompany their friends, the Von Rosens, to their new home in America; and will then return—probably they will be away about three months. They have been good enough to offer to take you with them. Now, if you really believe that our relations are altogether so wrong that nothing is left but separation, will you consent to try three months' separation first? I will not seek to control your actions in any way; but I think this is reasonable."

The mention of her friend's name brought some colour to the pale, thoughtful, serious face; and her bosom heaved with her rapid breathing, as he put this proposal before her.

"Yes," she said, "I will do what you wish."

"And your father?"

"I have not spoken to my father. I hope you will not. It is unnecessary."

CHAPTER X.

THE ISOBARS.

IT was an eager and an anxious time with our women-folk, who began to study the weather-charts in the newspapers, and to draw from thence the most dismal forebodings. The air was full of isobars: we heard their awful tread. Areas of low pressure were lying in wait for us; the barometer curves assumed in imagination the form of mountainous waves, luring us to our doom. And then we had a hundred kind friends writing to warn us against this line and that line; until it became quite clear that, as we were to be drowned anyhow, it did not matter a brass farthing which line we selected. And you—you most amiable of persons—who gave us that piece of advice about choosing a starboard berth, our blessings on you! It was an ingenious speculation. When two

vessels meet in mid-Atlantic—which they are constantly doing, and at full speed too—it is well known that they are bound to port their helm. Very well, argued our sympathetic adviser, porting the helm will make your steamer sheer off to starboard, and the other vessel, if there is to be a collision, will come crashing down on the port side; hence take your berth on the starboard side, for there you will be at least a trifle safer. It was a grain of comfort.

But there was one of us who feared none of these things—and she was to be the commander and comptroller of the expedition. She would have faced a dozen of the double-feathered arrows that appeared in the weather-charts. “Beware the awful isobar!” we said to her. “Beware the awful fiddlesticks!” she flippantly answered. And on the strength of her having done a bit of yachting now and again, she used solemnly to assure Lady Sylvia—on those evenings she spent with us then, talking about the preparations for the voyage—that there was nothing so delightful as life on the sea. The beautiful light and changing colour—the constant whirling by of the

water—the fresh breezes tingling on the cheek—all these she described with her eyes aglow ; and the snug and comfortable evenings, too, in the ruddy saloon, with the soft light of the lamps, and cards, and laughter. Here ensued a battle-royal. The first cause of this projected trip of ours was a dear friend and near neighbour called Mrs. von Rosen—though we may take the liberty of calling her Bell in these pages—and in the days of her maidenhood she once made one of a party who drove from London to Edinburgh by the old coach-roads, stopping at the ancient inns, and amusing themselves not a little by the way. This young lady now stoutly contested that life in a yacht was nothing to life in a phaeton ; and for her part she declared there was nothing half so beautiful as our sunny English landscapes, far away in the heart of the still country, as one drove through them in the sweet June days. It was the rude-spoken German ex-lieutenant who brought ridicule on this discussion by suggesting that the two modes of travelling might be combined : apply to Father Neptune, livery-stable keeper, Atlantic.

Lady Sylvia was indeed grateful to her kind friend for all the attentions shown her at this time. Of course it was as a mere pleasure-excursion that we outsiders were permitted to speak of this long journey by land and sea. We were not supposed to know anything of that cure of a sick soul that our sovereign lady had undertaken. Balfour was busy in Parliament. Lady Sylvia was very much alone ; and she had not been looking well of late. These her friends happened to have to make this trip to America : the opportunity of the double sea-voyage, and of the brisk run through the continent on the other side, was not to be thrown away. This was the understood basis of the agreement. We were not supposed to know that a courageous little woman had resolved to restore the happiness of two wedded lives, by taking this poor petted child and showing her the kingdoms of the earth, and the hardship and misery of human life, and what not. As for Lord Willowby, no one knows to this day whether that reticent peer suspected anything or not. He was kind enough to say, however, that he was sure his daughter was in good hands, and

sure, too, that she would enjoy herself very much. He deeply regretted that he could not ask to be allowed to join the party. We deeply regretted that also. But we had to conceal our grief. After all, it was necessary his lordship should stay at home, to keep down the rabbits.

The command went forth ; a proclamation from the Admiral-in-chief of the expedition that all ceremonies of leave-taking were to be performed within-doors and at home ; and that she would on no account allow any friend or relative of any one of the party to present himself or herself at Euston Square station, much less to go on with us to Liverpool. She was very firm on this point ; and we guessed why. It was part of her never-failing and anxious thoughtfulness and kindness. She would have no formal parting between Balfour and his wife take place under the observation of alien eyes. When Lady Sylvia met us at the station down in Surrey, she was alone. She was pale and very nervous ; but she preserved much outward calmness : and professed to be greatly pleased that at last we had fairly started. Indeed, we had more compassion for the other young wife

who was with us—who was being torn away from her two children and sent into banishment in Colorado for a whole long year. Our poor Bell could make no effort to control her grief. The tears were running hard down her face. She sat in a corner of the carriage ; and long after we had got away from any landmark of our neighbourhood that she knew, she was still gazing southward through these bewildering tears, as if she expected to see, somewhere over the elms in the roseate evening sky, some glorified reflection of her two darlings whom she was leaving behind. Her husband said nothing ; but he looked more savage than ever. For the past week—seeing his young wife so desperately distressed—he had been making use of the most awful language about Colonel Sloane and his flocks, and herds, and mines. The poor Colonel had done his best. He had left his wealth to this girl simply because he fancied she knew less about his life than most of her other relatives, and might cherish some little kindly feeling of gratitude towards him. Instead of paying for masses for his soul, he only asked that this young niece of his should remember him.

Well, there is no saying what her subsequent feelings with regard to him may have been ; but in the mean time the feelings of her husband were most pronounced. If he prayed for the soul of Five-Ace Jack, it was in an odd sort of language.

The homeless look about that big hotel in Liverpool!—the huge trunks, obviously American, in the hall and round the doors ; the unsettled people wandering around the rooms, all intent on their own private schemes and interests. What care had they for the childless mother and the widowed wife, who sat—a trifle mute, no doubt—at our little dinner table, and who only from time to time seemed to remember that they were starting away on a pleasure excursion ? The manager of the trip did her best to keep us all cheerful, and again and again referred to the great kindness of the owners of our noble ship, who had taken some little trouble in getting for us adjacent cabins.

The next day was hot and sultry, and when we went down to the side of the river to have a look at the ship that was to carry our various fortunes across the Atlantic, we saw her through a vague

silvery haze that in no way diminished her size. And, indeed, as she lay there, out in mid-stream, she seemed more like a floating town than a steamer. The bulk of her seemed enormous. Here and there were smaller craft—wherries, steam-launches, tenders, and what not ; and they seemed like so many flies hovering on the surface of the water when they came near that majestic ship. Our timid women-folk began to take courage. They did not ask whether their berths were on the starboard side. They spoke no more of collisions. And as *Queen T.*, as some of us called her, kept assuring them that their apprehensions of sea-sickness were entirely derived from their experiences on board the wretched and detestable little Channel boats, and that it was quite impossible for any reasonable Christian person to think of illness in the clean, bright, beautiful saloons and cabins of a first-class trans-Atlantic steamer, they plucked up their spirits somewhat, and did not sigh more than twice a minute.

It was about three in the afternoon that we stepped on board the tender. There was a good deal of cerebral excitement abroad among the

small crowd. People stared at each other in a nervous, eager manner, apparently trying to guess what had brought each other to such a pass. Leaving out of view the cheery commercial traveler, who was making facetious jokes, and exchanging pocket-knives and pencils with his friends, there was scarcely a face on board that did not suggest some bit of a story, and often that seemed to be tragic enough. There was a good deal of covert crying. And there was a good deal of boisterous racket in our quarter, chiefly proceeding from our young German friend, who was determined to distract the attention of his wife and of her gentle companion from this prevailing emotional business, and could think of no better plan than pretending to be angry over certain charges in the hotel bill, the delay in starting the tender off, and a dozen other ridiculous trifles.

Then we climbed up the gangway, and reached the deck of the noble and stately ship, passing along the row of stewards, all mustered up in their smart uniforms, until we made our way into the great saloon, which was a blaze of crimson cloth and shining gold and crystal.

“And this is how they cross the Atlantic!” exclaimed Queen T., who treasured revengeful feelings against the Channel steamers.

But that was nothing to her surprise when we reached our three cabins, which we found at the end of a small corridor. The yellow sunlight—yellowed by the haze hanging over the Mersey—was shining in on the brightly-painted wood, the polished brass, the clean little curtains of the berths; and altogether showed that, whatever weather we might have in crossing, nothing was wanting to ensure our comfort—not even an electric bell to each berth—so far as these snug and bright little cabins were concerned. Von Rosen was most anxious that we should continue our explorations of these our new homes. He was most anxious that we should at once begin unpacking the contents of our smaller bags, and placing them in order in our respective cabins. What had we to do on deck? We had no relatives or friends to show over the ship. There was nothing but a crowd up there—staring all over the place. We ought to make those preparations at once; so that we should have plenty of time subsequently to

secure from the purser good seats at the dinner-table, which should remain ours during the voyage.

A loud bell rang upon deck.

“Confound it!” cried the lieutenant, as if he would try to drown the noise with his own voice. “I have brought my latch-key with me! What do I want with a latch-key in America?”

But when that bell rang, our Queen T. turned—just for a moment—a trifle pale.

“Lady Sylvia,” said she, “would you not like to go up on deck, to see the ship get up her anchor?”

We knew why she wanted the young wife to go on deck; and we were inwardly indignant that the poor thing should be subjected to this gratuitous cruelty. Was she not suffering enough herself, that she should be made the spectator of the sufferings of others? But she meekly assented; and we followed too.

It was a strange scene that this crowd on deck presented, now that the ringing of another bell had caused a good many of the friends and relatives of passengers to leave the large ship and

take their stand on the paddle-boxes of the tender. At first sight it seemed rather a merry and noisy crowd. Messages were being called out from the one vessel to the other; equally loud jokes were being bandied; missiles, which turned out to be keepsakes, were being freely hurled through the air and more or less deftly caught. But this was not the aspect of the crowd that the monitress of Lady Sylvia wished to put before her eyes. There were other ceremonies going on. The mute handshake—the last look—the one convulsive tremor that stopped a flood of tears with a heart-breaking sob—these were visible enough. And shall we ever forget the dazed look in the face of that old man with the silvery hair as he turned away from bidding good-bye to a young woman apparently his daughter? He did not seem quite to understand what he was doing. One of the officers assisted him by the arm as he stepped on to the gangway; he looked at him in a vague way, and said, “Thank you—thank you; good-bye,” to him. Then there was a middle-aged man, with a bit of black cloth round his hat. But why should one recall these moments of extreme human misery? If it was necessary

that Lady Sylvia should drink this bitter draught—if it was necessary that she should have pointed out to her something of what real and definite sorrows and agonies have to be borne in life—why should these things be put before any one else? The case of Lady Sylvia, as every woman must perceive, was quite exceptional. Is it for a moment to be admitted that there could be in England any other woman—or, let us say, any small number of other women—who, being far too fortunately circumstanced, must needs construct for themselves wholly imaginary grievances and purely monomaniacal wrongs, to the distress equally of themselves and their friends? The present writer, at all events, shrinks from the responsibility of putting forward any such allegation. He never heard of any such women. Lady Sylvia was Lady Sylvia; and if she was exceptionally foolish, she was undergoing exceptional punishment.

Indeed she was crying very bitterly, in a stealthy way, as the great ship on which we stood began to move slowly and majestically down the river. The small and noisy tender had steamed back to the wharf, its occupants giving us many a

farewell cheer so long as we were within earshot. And now we glided on through a thick and thundery haze that gave a red and lurid tinge to the coast we were leaving. There was a talk about dinner; but surely we were to be allowed time to bid good-bye to England? Farewell—farewell! The words were secretly uttered by many an aching heart.

It was far from being a joyful feast, that dinner; though Von Rosen talked a great deal, and was loud in his praises of everything—of the quick, diligent service and pleasant demeanour of the stewards, of the quality of the hock, and the profusion of the *carte*. The vehement young man had been all over the ship; and seemed to know half the people on board already.

“Oh, the captain!” said he. “He is a famous fellow—a fine fellow—his name is Thompson. And the purser, too, Evans—he is a capital fellow—but he is in twenty places at once. Oh, do you know, Lady Sylvia, what the officers call their servant who waits on them?”

Lady Sylvia only looked her inquiry; the pale, beautiful face was dazed with grief.

“Mosquito!—I suppose because he plagues them. And you can have cold baths—salt water—every morning. And there will be a concert in a few evenings—for the Liverpool Seamen’s Home—Bell, you will sing for the concert?”

And so the young man rattled on, doing his best to keep the women-folk from thinking of the homes they were leaving behind. But how could they help thinking, when we got up on deck after dinner, and stood in the gathering dusk? England had gone away from us altogether. There was nothing around us but the rushing water—leaden-hued—with no trace of phosphorescent fire in it; and the skies overhead were dismal enough. We stayed on deck late that night, talking to each other—about everything except England.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LAST LOOK.

ALL around us the great unbroken circle of the sea—overhead the paler colour of the morning sky—and this huge floating palace of 4,500 tons crashing its way through the rolling waves of a heavy ground-swell—that was what we found when we stepped out on to the white and sunlit deck.

“What cheer, Madame Columbus? And how goes the log?” cried the lieutenant, making his appearance at the top of the companion-way.

Madame Columbus had been up betimes—in order to make sure of her bath—and was now engaged in private conversation with Lady Sylvia.

“We are a point west by north of Ben Nevis,”

she answered, promptly, "but the Irish coast is not yet in sight."

The latter half of her statement was true, anyhow ; there was not even the faint cloud of an island visible all round the dark blue horizon. And so we set out on our march up and down the deck which had been strictly enjoined upon us by our admiral-in-chief, but which was occasionally interfered with by a lurch that sent this or that couple flying towards the hand-rail. And we were all full of our new experiences ; of the strange sensation of plunging through the night at this terrible speed ; of the remarkable ease with which articles could be taken out of portmanteaus ; and of the absolute impossibility of getting them put in again, so as to secure something like order in our respective cabins. It was a brilliant morning, with a fresh and delightful breeze ; but so blue was the sky, and so blue was the sea, that the eyes becoming accustomed to this intense blue, saw everything on board the ship as of a glowing brown or red, while the human faces we looked at in passing were simply a blaze of crimson. Then we went below to breakfast ; and instituted a sort

of formal acquaintance with two or three folks who had been, the previous evening at dinner, absolute strangers to us.

That forenoon, as we sat on deck with our books which were seldom looked at, we could not understand why Queen T. was so fiercely opposed to our going ashore at Queenstown for an hour or two. As the pale line of coast now visible on the horizon came nearer and more near, she seemed to regard both Ireland and the Irish with great disfavour, though we knew very well that ordinarily she had quite remarkable affection for both.

“What is Queenstown?” said she. “A squalid little place, with beggars and tradespeople that prey on the ignorance of Americans. They give you baskets of fruit with brown paper filling up half. They charge you——”

“Why, you have never been there in your life!” exclaimed Bell, with staring eyes.

“But I know all the same!” was the retort. “Haven’t Americans told me again and again of their first experiences of Irish hospitality? And what is the use of being at all that trouble of going ashore, to look at a miserable little town!”

“Madame,” said the lieutenant, with a loud laugh, “I do think you are afraid we will not come back, if we once are on the land. Do you think we will run away? And the company—will they give us back our passage-money?”

She relapsed into a proud and indignant silence; we knew not how Queenstown had managed so grievously to offend her.

And now we drew near the point at which we were to bid a real farewell to our native land; and as we slowly glided into the broad, bright bay, Queenstown gave us an Irish welcome of laughter shining through tears, of sunlight struggling through fleecy clouds of rain, and lighting up the beautiful green shores. There was a beautiful green, too, in the water of the bay, which was rippled over by a light westerly breeze. Well, we remained on board after all. We were informed by our Admiral-in-chief that now, when the ship was almost empty and certainly still, was an excellent opportunity for setting our cabins to-rights, and putting away everything we should not require on the voyage. What was there to see by remaining on deck? A quiet bay, a green shore,

and some white houses—that was all. Those of us who rebelled, and insisted on remaining on deck, she treated with silent scorn. She was successful, at least, in carrying Lady Sylvia with her below.

And yet it must be confessed that we were all of us glad to get away from Queenstown. We wished to feel that we had really started. Wasting time in waiting for mails is not an exciting occupation, at Queenstown or elsewhere. When, therefore, the tender came out from the shore, and discharged her human and other cargo, and when the order was given to let go the gangway, we were glad enough. All of us, perhaps, except one; for what meant that slight exclamation—and the inadvertent step forward—as this last means of communication was withdrawn? But there was a friendly hand on her arm. The child looked on in mute despair, as the great vessel began to move through the water. There was a good deal of cheering as we now and finally set out on our voyage; she did not seem to hear it.

And now we were out on the Atlantic—the land gradually receding from sight—the great ship forging ahead at full speed through the rushing

waves—the golden glory of the afternoon shining on her tall masts. They were getting out some sail, too ; and as the string of men were hauling up the heavy gaff of the mizen-trysail, one tall fellow, the leader of the choir, was singing so that all could hear—

Oh, it's Union Square as I chanced for to pass,

Yo, heave, ho !

Oh, it's there I met a bonnie young lass :

while the idiotic refrain—

Give a man time to roll a man down—

sounded musically enough with its accompaniment of flapping canvas and rushing waves. And there were rope-quoits got out, too ; and the more energetic shovel-board ; while those who scorned such vain delights were briskly promenading the deck with an eye to dinner. And then at dinner—the sudden cry that made every one start up from the table and crowd round the nearest port-hole to look out on that extraordinary sunset—the sea a plain of dark and rich purple, almost hard in its outline against the sky—the sky a pure, dazzling breadth of green—a sort of olive green, but so

dazzling and clear that it burnt itself into the memory, and will for ever remain there—with a few lines of still more lambent gold barred across the west. That fire of colour had blinded all eyes. When we returned to our seats, we could scarcely see each other.

“What a beautiful night we shall have!” said Lady Sylvia, who was doing her best to be very brave and cheerful—because, you see, it was our common duty, she considered, to cheer up the spirits of the young mother who had left her two children behind her—“and what a pity it is, my dear Mrs. Von Rosen, that you did not bring your guitar with you! Half of the charm of the voyage will be lost. And you know it will be moonlight to-night—you might have sang to us.”

“I am like Mrs. S——’s little girl,” said our Bell, “whom they used to bother so before visitors. She said one day, in the most pathetic voice, ‘I wish I didn’t know no songs; and then I shouldn’t have to sing none.’ But the guitar has been put away for a time now. That belonged to the days of romance. Do you know any Scotch songs, Lady Sylvia? I have gone mad about them lately.”

“I believe it was once remarked of you, Bell,” says one of us, “that your heart was like a magnetized needle, always turning towards the north. But what we want to know is where you are going to stop. Cumberland ballads used to be enough for you; then you got to the Borders; then to the Lowlands, and now you are doubtless among the clans. Does anybody know if there are stirring tunes in Iceland; or any *Folkslieder* to be picked up about the North Pole? Nevertheless we will take what you like to give us. We will pardon the absence of the guitar. When the moon comes out, we will take up the rugs on deck, and get into a nice shadowy corner, and—and what is that about *Above—Below—All’s well!*—?”

“We are indeed well off,” says our grave monitress, “that we have nothing to think about but moonlight and singing. What I am thankful for is that the clear night will lessen the chances of our running down any unfortunate small vessel. Ah! you don’t know, Lady Sylvia, how often that happens—and nobody ever hears of it. A huge ship like this would simply cut down one of these smaller vessels to the water’s edge and

go clean over her. And of course the greatest danger of our doing so is near land. Think of the poor men, after being months at sea perhaps, and within a day or so of meeting their wives and families again, finding this huge monster crashing down on them. I tremble when I hear people speak of the vessels anchored on the Newfoundland Banks—and the fogs there—and the great steamers going on through the night. A collision is nothing to us—I suppose we should scarcely feel any shock at all; but it is certain death to the unhappy wretches who are out there at the fishing. Well, it is part of the risk of their calling. They have to support their families somehow; and I suppose their wives know each time they leave the land that they may never be heard of again. I wonder whether these poor men ever think that they are hardly used in life. No doubt they would prefer to belong to a fine club; and their wives would like to drive about in carriages. But I suppose they have their compensations. The home-coming must be pleasant enough.”

“But do we go on right through a fog, all the same?” asked our Bell in some alarm.

“At a reduced speed, certainly ; and people say that the booming of the fog-horn at night is one of the most horrid sounds in the world.”

“You never thought of that danger, Lady Sylvia,” said Bell, with a smile, “when your—when Mr. Balfour and you used to speak of going round the world in a steam-yacht. By the way, I suppose that steam-yacht that came out with us has got back to Queenstown by this time.”

Queen T. glanced quickly and nervously at her.

“I hope so,” said Lady Sylvia. “It was very friendly of the people to escort us a bit on our way. I suppose they knew some one on board. But I did not see any one waving a good-bye to them when they left.”

“Oh,” said Queen T., “I have no doubt they only came out for a run.”

When we went on deck we found the last glow of the twilight fading out of the north-western skies. We were all alone on the moving world of waters—the huge metallic-hued waves breaking over in masses of white foam that were clearly visible in the semi-darkness. But by this time

we had grown so accustomed to the monotonous sound of the rushing waves that it was almost the equivalent of silence ; so that any other sound—the striking of the bells every half-hour in the steering-room, for example, and the repetition by the man at the look-out—was startlingly clear and distinct. We got our chairs brought together, and the shawls spread out ; and formed a little group by ourselves, whose talking, if we were so inclined, could not well be overheard. But there was not much talking, somehow. Perhaps that monotonous rushing of the water had a drowsy effect. Perhaps we were trying to find out the names of the pale, clear stars overhead, far beyond the tall masts that kept swaying this way and that as the vessel rose and fell on the long waves. Or were we wondering whether the man at the look-out, whose form was duskily visible against the clear, dark sky, could make out some small and distant speck—some faint glimmer of a light, perhaps—to tell us that we were not quite alone in this awful world of waters ?

Then the stars grew paler ; for a new glory began to fill the lambent skies, and the white deck

began to show black shadows that moved on the silvery surface as the ship rose to the waves.

“Do you remember that moonlight night at Grasmere?” says Queen T. to her friend. “And won’t you sing us ‘The Flowers of the Forest’?”

It was quite another song that she sang—in a low voice that mingled curiously with the monotonous, melancholy rush of the waves. It was about the bonnie young Flora who “sat sighing alane; the dew on her plaid an’ the tear in her e’e.”

Why should she have picked out this ballad of evil omen for our very first night on the Atlantic?—

*She looked at a boat wi’ the breezes that swung,
Away on the wave, like a bird of the main;
An’ aye as it lessened she sighed and she sung
‘Farewell to the lad I shall ne’er see again.’*

Perhaps her conscience smote her. Perhaps she thought it was hardly fair to suggest to this poor young thing who was thrown on our care that the cruel parting she had just undergone was a final one. At all events, as she began to sing

this other song, it seemed to some of us that she was taking a clear leap across a long interval of time, and imagining herself somehow as already returning to English shores. For she sang—

*Rest, ye wild storms, in the caves of your slumbers !
How your dread howling a lover alarms !
Wauken, ye breezes ; row gently, ye billows ;
And waft my dear laddie ance mair to my arms ?
But oh ! if he's faithless and minds na his Nannie,
Flow still between us, thou wide roaring main !
May I never see it, may I never trow it,
But dying believe that my Willie's my ain !*

Perhaps it was only our idle fancy, on this beautiful and pensive night, that coupled Bell's selections with the fortunes of our guest, but all the same one of us—who is always tenderly thoughtful in such small matters—suddenly called out—

“Come, Bell, we shall have no more sad songs. Who was it that used to sing ‘The Braes o’ Mar’ with a flushed face as if all the clans from John O’ Groat’s to Airlie were marshalling under her leadership ?”

Bell is an obliging person. She sang that song, and many another ; and there was an attempt at

a modest duet or two ; while the ceaseless roar of the waves went on, and we watched the moonlight quiver and gleam on the hurrying waters.

“Oh, my dear,” says Queen T., putting her hand on the head of her old friend and companion, who was nestled at her feet, “this is not at all like crossing the Channel, is it?”

“Not much,” says Bell. “I am already convinced that my ancestors were Vikings.”

Nor was it at all like crossing the Channel when we went below for the night—passing the great ruddy saloon, with its golden lamps and hushed repose—and sought out the privacy of our quiet and neat little cabins. But here an act of retributive justice had to be administered. There were two people standing alone in one of these cabins, amid a wild confusion of slippers, dressing-bags, and clothes-brushes. Says the one to the other, sternly—

“What did you mean by that suspicious glance when the steam-yacht was mentioned?”

“What steam-yacht?” says she innocently ; but in the dusky light of the lamp her face is seen to flush.

“You know very well.”

Here her fingers became somewhat nervous ; and a piteous and guilty look comes into the eyes.

“Do you mean to deny that Balfour was in that boat ; that you knew he was to be in it ; and that you dared to keep the knowledge from his wife ?”

“And if he was,” says she, with her lips beginning to quiver, “how could I tell her ? It would have driven the poor thing mad with pain. How could I tell her ?”

“I believe you have a heart as hard as the nether millstone.”

And perhaps she had ; but it was certainly not her own sorrows that were making the tears run down her face, as she pretended to be busy over a portmanteau.

CHAPTER XII.

MID-ATLANTIC.

THOSE glad days!—each one a new wonder as our tremendous speed drove us into successive and totally different worlds of light and colour. The weather-prophets were all at fault. Each morning was a surprise. There might have been, for example, a plunging and roaring during the night, that told us there was a bit of sea on; but who could have imagined beforehand the brilliant and magnificent beauty of this westerly gale—the sea rolling along in mountainous waves—the wild masses of spray springing high into the air from the bows of the ship—the rapid rainbows formed by the sunlight striking on those towering clouds—then a rattle as of musketry fire as they fell on the sunlit and streaming decks? And if there were two obstinate young creatures who would not at all consent to stand in the huddled com-

panion-way—if they would insist on having their morning march up and down the plunging decks, with the salt water running down their reddened faces—had they not their reward? They were the discoverers of the fact that we were running a race. What were those black objects that leaped clear into the sunlight, and went head-foremost again into the rushing waves? One after the other the merry dolphins sprung into the air and vanished again, and we were grateful to them for this friendly escort. They were sociable fellows, those dolphins—not like the whales, which generally kept away somewhere near the horizon, where they could only be made out by the recurrent jet of white foam.

And then, again, it might have been the very next morning that we found the world of water and sky grown still and dreamlike—pervaded by a mystic calm. The sea like vast folds of silk, dull, smooth, and lustreless—a waste of tender and delicate greys, broken only by the faintest shadows where the low waves rolled; the sky lightly clouded over and also grey, with lines of yellowish light that grew narrower and narrower as they

neared the horizon; and here the only bit of colour in the vague and shadowy picture—a sharp, bold, clear line of blue all round the edge of the world, where the pale sea and the pale sky met.

And so we went on day after day; and the bells tolled the half-hours; and the gong sounded for meals: and the monotonous chorus of the sailors—

*So now farewell,
My bonnie young girl;
For I'm bound for the Rio Gran'—*

told us of the holystoning of the decks. There was rather more card-playing than reading; there was a good deal of perfunctory walking; sometimes there was a song or two in the long saloon of an evening. And by this time, too, people had got to know each other, and each other's names and circumstances, in a most surprising manner. The formal "Good morning" of the first day or two had developed into "And how are you this morning, Mr.—?" The smallest civility was sufficient warranty for the opening of an acquaintanceship. Ladies freely took any proffered arm for that inevitable promenade before dinner—all

except one, and she the most remarked of all. What was it, then, that seemed to surround her—that seemed to keep her apart? A certain look in her face?—she was not a widow. Her manner?—she was almost anxiously courteous to every one around her. All sorts and conditions of men were eager to bring her chair, or pick up her dropped book, or bid other passengers stand aside to let her pass through the companion-way; and all the elderly women—to judge by their looks—seemed to bless her in their hearts for her sweet face; and all the young women appeared to be considerably interested in her various costumes; but somehow she made no familiar acquaintances. They might challenge our bright-faced Bell to make up a side at rope-quoits; and that brave lass—though she seldom landed more than two out of the dozen of quoits on the peg—would set to work with a will, her eyes bluer than ever with the blue light from the sea, the sunlight touching the constant gladness of her face. But when our beautiful, pale, sad guest came near to look on, they only moderated their wild laughter somewhat. They did not challenge

her. It was not she whom they expected to pencil down the score on the white paint of the ventilation-shaft. But there was not one of these brisk and active commercial gentlemen (who were the most expert performers) who would not instantly stop the game in order to dart away and get a chair for her : that modest smile of thanks was sufficient reward.

There was a young lady who sat near us at dinner—a very pretty young lady who had come all the way from San Francisco, and was returning home after a lengthened stay in Europe. It was quite evident that she and her friends must have stayed some time in Geneva, and that they had succumbed to the temptations of the place. She seemed to be greatly struck by Lady Sylvia's appearance ; and for the first day or two paid more attention to her than to her meals. Now on the third day, imagine our astonishment—for small things become great on board ship—on finding the pretty young San Franciscan come in to breakfast without a scrap of jewellery either round her neck or on her hands. She had even discarded the fore-finger ring—an opal surrounded with

diamonds—which we had unanimously declared to be beautiful. Moreover, she never wore any jewellery during the rest of that voyage. Why was this? Wearing jewellery, even Genevan jewellery, is a harmless foible. Is there any magnetism radiating from a human being that is capable of destroying bracelets and finger-rings, or, at least, of rendering them invisible? These are the mysteries of life.

But indeed we had more serious matters to think about, for we had with us a stern monitress, who did not fail to remind us that existence, even on board a trans-Atlantic steamer, is not all composed of dry champagne and rope-quoits. She had made the acquaintance of the purser, and from him she had obtained particulars regarding some of the many emigrants on board. The piteous tales she told us may have received a touch here and there from an imagination never of the dullest; but they sounded real enough; and it was very clear that they went straight to Lady Sylvia's heart. Was it not possible, she anxiously asked, to do something for this poor man who was dying of consumption, and who,

conscious of his doom, was making a struggle to have a look at his two sons out in Montana before the sunken eyes finally closed? What we had to do for him, a day or two afterwards, was to attend his funeral. The weighted corpse, wrapped round with a Union-Jack, was borne along by the sailors to the stern of the ship, and there a number of the passengers congregated, and stood with uncovered head to hear the short burial service read. It was not a pathetic scene. The man was unknown to us but for that brief hint of his dying wish. The wild winds and the rushing waves drowned most of the words of the service. And yet there was something strange in the suddenness with which the corpse plunged down and disappeared, and in the blank loneliness of the sea thereafter. The man had neither friend nor relative on board.

There was an open space on the lower deck into which, for the freer air, the emigrants often came; and there they followed their domestic pursuits as unconscious as bees of being looked down upon from above. Surely, it was with no impertinent curiosity that our Queen T. taught her gentle

friend to regard these poor people ; rather it was with a great sympathy and friendliness. One morning she drew her attention to a young woman who appeared to be also a young mother, for she had a couple of children dawdling about her heels ; and Lady Sylvia was greatly distressed that those young things should be so dirty and obviously neglected. She was for sending for the invaluable Mr. Evans, and begging him to take some little present to the mother.

“ But why should they be dirty ? And why should they be neglected ? ” demanded that fierce social philosopher, whose height is five-foot-three. “ Look at the mother—look at her tawdry ribbons—her unkempt hair—her dirty face. She is a woman who has got no womanly pride : if she has a husband, God help him !—fancy what his home must be. If he has got rid of her, I should imagine he must be glad ; he could keep the house cleaner without her. But look at that young woman over there—I know she has a young family too, for I saw them this morning. See how she has tucked up her dress so that she can go over the wet decks ; see how she has carefully

braided her hair; and do you see how all those tin things she has been washing are shining bright—and look at her now—polishing that knife—and putting the cloth up on the rope to dry. For my part, I have no sympathy for women who are squalid and dirty. There is no reason in the world why they should be so. A woman—and especially a wife—ought to make the best of her circumstances; and if her husband does drink and ill-use her, she won't make him any the more ashamed of himself by becoming a slattern and driving him away from a dirty house. I am going down to speak to that young woman who is polishing the tin jugs."

And she did, too; and became acquainted with all the young wife's circumstances. These were not at all dreadful or pathetic. She was a brisk and active young Irish woman, who was very proud that her husband in New York had at last saved up enough money to send for her and her children, and her only fear was that, New York being such a big place, there might be a chance of missing her husband on going ashore. Queen T. wholly reassured her on this point; and

begged to be allowed to make the acquaintance of her children, and of course she gave them a keepsake all round—with a whole heap of fruit and sweets obtained by illicit means from the chief saloon-steward.

On—on—on—night and day—with this tremendous speed. Even our women-folk now had dismissed all fear of being ill. On one morning, it is true—during a pretty stiff gale in the “Devil’s Hole,” or “Rolling Forties,”—they were remarkably abstemious at breakfast, but not one of them succumbed; and now that we were getting near the Newfoundland Banks they waxed valiant. They declared that crossing the Atlantic was mere child’s play compared to crossing the Channel. Bell grew learned about square-sails and try-sails, and had picked up all the choruses of the sailors. “*Give a man time to roll a man down,*” is not at all a proper sentiment for a young lady; but a great deal is admissible at sea.

Then we had a dolorous day of rain; and there were more huddled groups than ever in the smoking-room playing poker; and more disconsolate groups than ever at the top of the com-

panion-way looking out on the leaden sky and the leaden sea. Moreover, as the day waned fog came on; and that evening, as we sat in the saloon, there was ominous conversation abroad. We heard the dull booming of the fog-horn as we sped through the night. Was not our course somewhat too northerly? What about icebergs? Towards morning should we not be dangerously near Cape Race—not dangerously for ourselves, but for the anchored schooners and smacks on the Great Bank, any one of which would be ploughed down by this huge vessel, with only perhaps one shriek of agony to tell what had happened? It was a gloomy evening.

But then, the next morning! Where was the fog? A dome of clear blue sky; a sea of dark blue, with the crisp white crests of the running waves; a fresh, invigorating westerly breeze. And now surely we were getting out of the region of unknown and monotonous waters into something definite, human, approachable; for it was with a great interest and gladness that the early risers found all around them the anchored schooners, and it was with even a greater interest

that we drew near and passed a rowing-boat full of men whose bronzed faces were shining red in the sun.

“These are the poor fellows I told you about,” said our admiral and commander-in-chief to her friend. “Think of the danger they must be in on a foggy night—think of their wives and children at home. I should not wonder if their wives were glad to see them when they got back to shore!”

“It is dreadful—dreadful,” said Lady Sylvia; and perhaps it was the new excitement of seeing these strange faces that made her eyes moist.

We had to pass still another long, beautiful day, with nothing around us visible but the blue sea and the blue sky; but if the honest truth must be told, we were not at all impatient to find before us the far low line of the land. Indeed, we looked forward to leaving this life on board ship with not a little regret. We were going further, perhaps to fare worse. We had become a sort of happy family by this time; and had made a whole host of friends, whom we seemed to have known all our lives. And one of us was rather proud of her skill at rope-quoits; and

another was mad on the subject of sea-air; and another—his initials were Oswald von Rosen—was deeply interested in the raffles and betting of the smoking-room. What would the next day's run be? What would the number of the pilot be? Would that ancient mariner have a moustache or not? There was a frightful amount of gambling going on.

The next morning our admiral insisted that there was a strong odour of seaweed in the air; and seemed proud of the fact.

“Madame Columbus,” said our German friend, seriously, “it is a happy omen. I do not think you could prevent a mutiny much longer—no—the men say there is no such place as America—they will not be deceived—they will return to Spain. The crew of the *Pinta* are in revolt. They do not care any more for the presence of those birds—not at all. If we do not see land soon, they will kill you, and go home.”

But the confidence which we placed in our admiral was soon to be justified. Far away on the southern horizon we at length descried a pilot-boat flying the flag of proffered assistance.

We hailed with joy the appearance of this small vessel, which the savage inhabitants of the nearest coast had doubtless sent out to welcome the pioneers of civilisation ; and we regarded with awe and reverence the sublime features of Madame Columbus, now irradiated with triumph. As for the wretched creatures who had been mutinous it is not for this hand to chronicle the sudden change in their manner : “ *They implored her,*” says a great historian, “ *to pardon their ignorance, incredulity, and insolence, which had created so much unnecessary disquiet, and had so often obstructed the prosecution of her well-concerted plan ; and passing, in the warmth of their admiration, from one extreme to another, they now pronounced her whom they had so lately reviled and threatened to be a person inspired by Heaven with sagacity and fortitude more than human, in order to accomplish a design so far beyond the ideas and conceptions of all former ages.*”

Stranger still, the native whom we took on board this friendly boat was found to be clothed ; and he spoke a language which, although not English, was intelligible. We regarded him with great curiosity ; but there was nothing savage or

uncouth in his manners. He had rings in his ears ; and he smoked a short clay-pipe.

Of course our excitement all that day was great ; and there was a wild scene in the smoking-room in the evening—a mock trial by jury having produced a good many bottles of whiskey in the way of fines. The songs were hearty, and hoarse. We raffled a rug.

On the following morning there was something to make one rub one's eyes. It was a long, faint, pale blue thing, stretching along the western horizon, and having the appearance of a huge whale lying basking in the mist of the early sunlight. We called aloud to those who were below. That blue line in the yellow mist was—America !

CHAPTER XIII.

LANDED !

THERE was excitement enough, to be sure. Every one was on deck, eagerly regarding the land that was momentarily drawing nearer. And who were these ladies whom we now saw for the first time? Surely they could not have been ill all the way across the Atlantic? Or had they not rather given way to an abject terror of the sea and hidden themselves close in their berths in order to get a sort of ostrich-safety? And the gentlemen who attended them, too—whence had they procured such a supply of tall hats? We resented the appearance of that ungainly article of costume. We had grown accustomed to the soft and delicate colours of sea and cloud; this sudden black patch struck a blow on the eye; it was an outrage on the harmonious atmospheric effects all around us.

For now we were slowly steaming over the bar, in the stillness of the summer morning : and the beautiful olive green of the water, and the great bay before us, and the white-sailed schooners, and the long semicircle of low green hills, were all softened together with a mist of heat. The only sharp point of light was close at hand, where the promontory of Sandy Hook, blazing in sunlight, jutted out into the rippling water. It was all like a dream as we slowly glided along. The pale hills looked spectral and remote : we preferred not to know their name. And then, as we drew near the Narrows, our blue-eyed Bell could not conceal her astonishment and delight. Surely, she said, we had missed our way somewhere, and got back to the wrong side of the Atlantic ! The wooded hills coming close to the sea—the villas on the slopes, half-hidden in soft green foliage—the long line of sandy shore—the small yachts riding at anchor in the clear and rippling water—why, surely, surely, she said, we had just come down the Clyde, and had got to Dunoon, or Inellan, or the Kyles of Bute. We knew quite well that one of these yachts was the *Aglaia*. We

knew perfectly that if we were walking along the shore there, we should meet a thick-set little man in smart blue uniform, who would say—

“Ay, ay, mem, and will you be going for a sail to-day, mem? Mr. —, it is away up the hills he is to-day; and he will be penting all the day; and the wind it is ferry good to-day, mem, for a run down to the Cumbraes and back, mem.”

And what would our Bell answer? She would say—

“Dear Captain Archie, we will go on board the *Aglaiia* at once, and go to the Cumbraes, and further than that. We will leave Mr. — painting up in the hills for ever and ever, until he comes down a Rip Van Winkle. We will go far beyond the Cumbraes, to Loch Ranza and Kilbranan Sound, to the Sound of Jura and Loch Buy, and we will listen to the singing of the mermaid of Colonsay. And I pledge you my word, Captain Archie, that we will never once in all the voyage begin to cry because we are not bound for Idaho.”

But these idle dreams, begotten of the morning mist and the sunlight, were soon dispelled. We

came to anchor off Staten Island. We regarded the natives who boarded us from the small steamer with great interest and wonder ; they were as like ordinary human beings as possible, and did not seem at all depressed by having to live in a place some three thousand miles away from anywhere — which was our first notion of America. Then we had to go down into the saloon, and go through the form of swearing we had no forbidden merchandise in our luggage. It was a tedious process ; but we did not fail to admire the composure of one stout little gentleman, who passed the time of waiting in copying out on a large sheet of paper a poem entitled “Love.”

The love that sheds its mortal ray,

the verses began. He had stumbled across them in a book out of the saloon library ; and they had been too much for his kindly heart. Happily he had his copy completed before the great ship was got into the dock.

And now, the dusky, steepled mass of New York lay before us ; and experts were eagerly naming the principal buildings to strangers : and the sun was beating fiercely on us with a heat we

had never experienced at sea. There was a little black crowd of people on the wharf; this great floating palace seemed bearing down on the top of them. And surely it was preposterous that handkerchiefs should be waved already.

Now the people who had warned us of the awful isobars, and generally recommended us to say our prayers before stepping on board a trans-Atlantic steamer, had also harrowed our souls with a description of the difficulties of landing. Two sovereigns was the least tip to be slipped into the hands of the custom-house officer, and even then he might turn upon us with a fiendish malignity and scatter our innocent wardrobes all about the wharf. Then what about getting to a hotel in a city that has no cabs? Should we get into a labyrinth of tramway-cars, and end by getting back to the steamer and demanding that we should be taken to Liverpool forthwith? Well, we never quite knew how it was all managed; but there was no scrimmage, and no tipping of any sort, and nothing but the most formal opening of one portmanteau out of a dozen; and such remarkable civility, swiftness, and good arrangement that

before we could wholly understand it we were being whirled away in a huge hotel-omnibus that had high springs like a George IV. chariot, and that ploughed through the thick dust, and then sprung up on the tramway-rails with a bound that flung us about like peas in a bladder.

“Gracious goodness!” cried Queen T., clinging on to the window, so that she should not be flung out on the other side, “this is more dangerous than crossing a dozen Atlantics!”

“Madame,” said our German companion, with his teeth clenched, and his hands keeping a tight grip of about a dozen bags, umbrellas, and shawls, “the Americans suffer a great deal from liver complaint; that is why they keep their streets so.”

But what was the use of his talking about America? A booby could have seen we were not in America at all. We had expected to find New York a sort of overgrown Liverpool; but here we were—in Paris! Paris everywhere—in the green casements of the windows—the plaster-fronted houses with mansard roofs—the acacia-looking ailanthus along the pavements—the

trailing creepers about the balconies—the doors of carved wood with white metal handles. Paris, Paris everywhere—in the hot, dry air and the pale and cloudless sky—in the gaudy shop-fronts and restaurants, with Parisian lettering on the signs. And surely this, too, is a Parisian hotel that we enter—the big and gilt saloons, the bedrooms heavily furnished in dark red velvet, an odour of tobacco everywhere, and blue clouds and pink cupids decorating the staircase?

And already we are involved in our first quarrel; for that vehement German has been insisting on the Irish porters bringing up all our luggage at once; and as there has been a sort of free fight below, he comes fuming up-stairs.

“Ah, it is true,” says he, “what an American did once tell me. He said, ‘You think it is all equality in my country? No, no; that is a great mistake. The obsequiousness,’ said he, ‘that marks the relations between the waiter at an hotel and the guest at an hotel, that is shocking—shocking. But then,’ said he, ‘the obsequiousness is all on the side of the guest.’”

We did not believe for a moment that any

such American ever existed ; though all nations—except the Scotch—have a common trick of saying evil things of themselves. We believed that this young man had impudently invented the story to excuse his overbearing and blustering treatment of three poor downtrodden sons of Erin, who, when they did bring up our portmanteaus, showed how they revolted against this ignoble slavery by pitching them down anyhow. They had our respectful sympathy ; but we dared not offer them the common consolation of a piece of money. They were doubtless—as their bearing showed them to be—the descendants of kings.

There is one distressing peculiarity of American hotels which has never been remarked upon by any traveller—and that is their extreme instability of foundation. As we were engaged in opening our portmanteaus to get some costumes more suitable for the prevailing heat, those French-looking bedrooms—with their tall and narrow windows sheltered by white casements, and their solid couches and easy-chairs all covered with that crimson velvet which is a sweet solace in July—our bedrooms, I say, kept oscillating this

way and that so that we could scarcely keep our feet. The passages, too! After a great deal of knocking and calling we mustered up our party to go down to luncheon; and then we found the long lobby swaying hither and thither far more violently than the saloon of the big ship had done in the "Rolling Forties." We dared not go down the stairs without clinging on to each other. We began to believe that the city of New York must be built like a water-hen's nest, which rises and falls with the rise and fall of the stream. It seemed very hard, indeed, that we should have successfully crossed the Atlantic without experiencing any discomfort, only to find ourselves heaved about in this fashion. It was observed, however, that this strange conduct on the part of the hotel gradually ceased as we sat at luncheon; so that we were happily allowed to examine the characteristics of the American family at the next table—the first distinctive group of natives we had seen on shore. They fully bore out all we had heard about this country. The eldest daughter was rather pretty, but sallow and unhealthy; and she drank a frightful quantity

of iced water. The mamma was shrunken and shrivelled—all eyes, like a young crow—and seemed afflicted with a profound melancholy. The papa devoted himself to his newspaper and his toothpick. And there were one or two younger children, noisy, turbulent, petted, and impertinent. All these well-known characteristics we perceived at a glance. It is true we afterwards discovered that the family was English ; but that was of little account.

We went for a drive in the hot, clear, brilliant afternoon. Paris—Paris—Paris everywhere. Look at the cafés, with their small marble tables ; look at the young men in straw hats who are continually chewing the end of a damp cigar that won't keep alight ; look at the showy nettings of the small, wiry, long-tailed horses, and the spider-wheeled vehicles that spin along to the Bois de—to the Central Park, that is. Of course when we meet one of those vehicles we keep to the right hand—anybody could have foretold that. And here is the Park itself—a very beautiful park indeed, with green foliage, winding roads, ornamented waters, statues, fountains. There is a

band playing down there in the shade of the trees. And here is a broad paved thoroughfare—a promenade—with a murmur of talking, and a prevailing odour of cigarettes. Of course it is Offenbach the band is playing; and it is pleasant enough to take a seat at this point of the Bois and look at the people, and listen to the music, and observe the glare of the sunlight on the greensward beyond and on the crystal shoots of the fountains. And the plashing drops of the fountains have a music of their own. What is it they are singing and saying and laughing?—

Tant qu'on le pourra, larirette,

On se damnera, larira !

Tant qu'on le pourra,

L'on trinquera,

Chantera,

Aimera

La fillette.

Tant qu'on le pourra, larirette,

On se damnera, larira !

“How do you like being in Paris?” says Lady Sylvia, with a gentle smile, to her companion, the German ex-lieutenant.

“I do not like thinking of Paris at all,” said he

gravely. "I have not seen Paris since I saw it from Versailles. And there are two of my friends buried at Versailles."

And what was making our glad-faced Bell so serious too? She had not at all expressed that admiration of the thoroughfares we had driven through which was fairly demanded by their handsome buildings. Was she rather disappointed by the French look of New York? Would she rather have had the good honest squalor, and dirt, and smoke of an English city? She was an ardent patriot, we all know. Of all the writing that ever was written, there was none could stir her blood like a piece that was first printed in a journal called the *Examiner*, and that begins

*First drink a health, this solemn night,
A health to England, every guest ;
That man's the best cosmopolite
Who loves his native country best.*

Was it because she had married a German that she used to repeat, with such bitterness of scorn, that bitterly scornful verse that goes on to say—

*Her frantic city's flashing heats
But fire, to blast, the hopes of men.*

*Why change the titles of your streets?
You fools, you'll want them all again!*

But it was surely not because she had married a German that, when she came to the next appeal, the tears invariably rushed to her eyes—

*Gigantic daughter of the West,
We drink to thee across the flood,
We know thee and we love thee best,
For art thou not of British blood?
Should war's mad blast again be blown,
Permit not thou the tyrant powers
To fight thy mother here alone,
But let thy broadsides roar with ours!
Hands all round!*

*God the tyrant's cause confound!
To our dear kinsmen of the West, my friends,
And the great name of England round and round!*

And was our poor Bell sorely grieved at heart, now that she had crossed the three thousand miles of the Atlantic, to find that the far daughter of the West had forsaken the ways of her old-fashioned mother, and had taken to French finery, and to singing—

*Tant qu'on le pourra, larirette,
On se damnera, larira!*

“My dear child,” it is necessary to say to her,

“why should you be so disappointed? They say that New York changes its aspect every five years; at present she has a French fit on. London changes too, but more slowly. Twenty years ago every drawing-room was a blaze of gilt and rose-colour; people were living in the time of Louis XIV. Five years ago Kensington and St. John’s Wood had got on to the time of Queen Anne; they fixed you on penitential seats, and gave you your dinner in the dark. Five years hence Kensington and St. John’s Wood will have become Japanese—I foresee it—I predict it—you will present me with a pair of gold peacocks if it isn’t so. And why your disappointment? If you don’t like Paris, we will leave Paris. To-morrow, if you please, we will go up the Rhine. The beauty of this Paris is that the Rhine flows down to its very wharves. Instead of taking you away out to Châlons, and whipping you on to Bar-le-duc and Nancy, and making you hop across the Vosges—the Vogesen, I beg your pardon—we will undertake to transport you in about twenty minutes, for the trifling sum of ten cents. Shall it be so?”

“I am not so stupid as to be disappointed with New York yet,” said our Bell, rather gloomily.

She called it New York. And she still believed it was New York, though we went in the evening to a great hall that was all lit up with small coloured lamps ; and the band was playing Lecocq ; and the same young men in the straw hats were promenading round and round ; and smoking cigarettes ; and smart waiters were bringing glasses of beer to the small tables in the boxes. Then we got back to the hotel not a little tired with the long, hot, parching day ; and we went to bed—perchance to dream of cool English rains, and our Surrey hedges, and the wet and windy clouds blowing over from the sea.

CHAPTER XIV.

GHOSTS AND VISIONS.

OF course we did not run away from New York merely because our good Bell was of opinion that the city had something too much of a French look. We had many excellent friends pressing their hospitalities on us ; we had many places to visit ; and then Queen T. must needs insist on telegraphing to England that letters should be sent out to us by a particular steamer. Letters ! No doubt when Columbus landed on the shores of San Salvador, and found a whole new world awaiting his explorations, his first impulse was to sit down and cry because he could not hear whether his mother-in-law's cold was better.

She was most economical, too, about that telegram. She would not have Lady Sylvia send a separate message.

“A couple of words extra will do,” she said,

“and they will understand to go over to the Hall and let your father—and Mr. Balfour, too—know that you have arrived safely. Why should you send a separate message?”

Why, indeed! The young wife was grateful to this kind friend of hers for so considerately throwing dust in our eyes. Why should she send a separate message to her husband, when the expense would be so desperate?

And although Queen T. lavished her time on writing letters to her boys at home, she always did that in the privacy of her own room, and rather strove to hide, or to make little of, these communications with England. Columbus himself, when the King and Queen asked him to give an account of his travels, could not have been more particular than this new discoverer in describing the wonderful things she had seen. The amount of information conveyed to those boys—who would much rather have had a sovereign sewn up between two cards—was enormous. On one occasion she was caught giving them a precise account of the Constitution of the United States, obviously cribbed from Mr. Nordhoff’s ‘Politics

for Young Americans." But then these budgets were generally written at night, and they were never paraded next day. When, before Lady Sylvia, she spoke of England, she treated it as a place of little account. Our necessary interests were in the things around us. One could not always be looking back, and indulging in sentiment. That was more to be pardoned—and, as she said this, the small philosopher was down at the Battery, her tender eyes gazing wistfully at a certain archway which barred our view of the sea beyond—that was more to be pardoned to the thousands upon thousands of sad-hearted men and women who had landed at this very point, who had passed through that archway with their hopes of the new world but feebly compensating them for their loss of home and kindred and friends. This, said she, was the most interesting spot in all America, and the most pathetic. And as she had been two whole days on this continent, we calmly acquiesced.

And at length the arrival of our letters, which contained a vast amount of important news about nothing at all, relieved the anxious hearts of the

two mothers and set us free. We bid farewell to this Atlantic Paris, with its hot pavements, its green ailanthus trees, its dry air, and intolerable thirst; and at about three o'clock on a strangely still and sultry day we drive down to the wharf and embark on a large and curiously-constructed steamer. But no sooner have we got out on to the broad bosom of the river than we find how grateful are these spacious saloons, and lofty archways, and cool awnings—for now the swift passage of the boat produces something like a breeze, and for a time we cease to brood on iced drinks. Under the pleasant awning we have our chairs, and books, and fruit; but the books are not much regarded, for, as we noiselessly and swiftly steam up against the current, it appears more and more certain that we have got into some mystic dreamland which can in no wise be any part of America, and that this river is not only neither the Hudson nor the Rhine, but wholly unlike any river seen out of a vision of the night. What is the meaning of the extraordinary still haze that kills our natural colours, and substitutes for them the mere phantasmagoria

of things? The low and wooded hills that here bound the river ought to be green; they are, on the contrary, of a pale opalesque blue and white. The blue sky is faintly obscured; we can only catch glimpses of white villas in these dusky woods; all around is a sort of slumberous, strangely-hued mist; and the only definite colour visible is the broad pathway of sunlight on the stream, and that is of a deep and ruddy bronze where the ripples flash. We begin to grow oppressed by this strange gloom. Is it not somewhere in this neighbourhood that the most devilish cantrips are still performed among the lonely hills, while the low thunder booms, and unearthly figures appear among the rocks? Should we be surprised if a ghostly barge put off from that almost invisible shore, bringing out to us a company of solemn and silent mariners, each with his horn of schnapps, and his hanger, and his ancient beard? Will they invite us to an awful carouse far up in the sombre mountains, while our hair turns slowly grey as we drink, and the immeasurable years go sadly by as we regard their wild faces? “Bell, Bell!” we cry, “exorcise these Dutch fiends! Sing us

a Christian song! Quick—before the thunder rolls!” And so, in the midst of this dreadful stillness, we hear a sweet and cheerful sound, and our hearts grow light. It is like the ringing of church-bells over fields of yellow corn:—

Faintly as tolls the evening chime—

the sound is low, but it is clear and sweet as the plashing of a fountain—

Our voices keep tune, and our oars keep time ;

And, indeed, there are two voices now humming the subdued melody to us—

*Soon as the woods on shore look dim,
We'll sing at St. Ann's our parting hymn !*

Surely the mists begin to clear, and the sun is less spectral over those dusky hills? Hendrick Hudson—Vanderdecken—whatever in the devil's name they call you—be off, you and your ghastly crew! We will not shake hands; but we wish you a safe return to your gloomy rocks, and may your barrels of schnapps never be empty! We can see them retire; there is no expression on their faces;

but the black eyes glitter, and they stroke their awful beards. The dark boat crosses the lane of bronzed sunshine; it becomes more and more dusky as it nears the shore; it vanishes into the mist! And what is this now, close at hand?—

Saint of this green isle, hear our prayer!

Grant us cool heavens and favouring air!

Vanderdecken, farewell! There will be solemn laughter in the hills to-night.

But there is no romance about this German ex-lieutenant, who exhibits an unconscionable audacity in talking to anybody and everybody, not excepting the man at the wheel himself; and of course he has been asking what this strange atmospheric phenomenon meant.

“Ha!” he says, coming along, “do you know what it is, this strange mist? It is the forests on fire—formiles, and miles, and miles—away over in New Jersey and in Pennsylvania, and it has been going on for weeks, so that the whole air is filled with the smoke. Do you smell it now? And there is not enough wind to carry it away—no—it lies about here, and you think it is a thunder-storm.

But it is not always—I mean everywhere; and the captain says there is not any at West-point, which is very good indeed. And it is very beautiful there, every one says; and the hotel is high up on the hill.”

In the mean time this mystical river had been getting broader, until it suddenly presented itself to us in the form of a wide and apparently circular lake, surrounded with mountains, the wooded slopes of which descended abruptly to the shores, and were there lost in a wilderness of rocks and bushes. Do you wonder that Bell called out—

“It is the Holy Loch! Shall we go ashore at Kilmun?”

And then the river narrowed again; and the waters were very green; and of course we be-thought ourselves of the Rhine, flowing rapidly along its deep gorge.

Or was it not rather one of the shores of the Lake of Geneva? Look at the picturesque little villas stuck over the rocks, amid the bushes and trees; while the greens seem all the more intense that the sun out there in the West has become a rayless orb of dusky and crimson fire—as round

and red and dull a thing as ever appeared in a Swiss lithograph. It never seemed to occur to any of us that after all this was not the Holy Loch, nor the Rhine, nor the Lake of Geneva, but simply the river Hudson.

And yet we could not help reverting to that Rhine fancy when we landed on the little wooden pier ; and entered a high hotel-omnibus ; and were dragged by two scraggy horses up an exceedingly steep and dusty road to a hotel planted far above the river, on the front of a plateau, and amidst trees. It was a big, wide hotel, mostly built of wood, and with verandahs all round ; and there were casements to the bedroom windows ; and everywhere in the empty and resounding corridors an odour as of food cooked with a fair amount of oil. We threw open one of these casements. There was a blaze of fire in the west. The wooded hills were of a dark green. Far below us flowed the peaceful river, with a faint mist gathering on it in the shadows.

Then, by-and-by, we descended to the large, bare-walled, bare-floored, but brilliantly-lighted saloon, in which the guests were assembling for

dinner ; and now it was no longer the Rhine, for the first object that struck the eye was the sharp contrast between the dazzling white of the tables and the glossy black faces and heads of the waiters. From this time forwards, it may here be said, we began to acquire a great liking for those coloured folk—not from any political sympathy, for we were but indifferently fierce politicians—but simply because we found Sambo, so far as we had the honour of making his acquaintance, remarkably good-natured, attentive, cheerful, and courteous. There was always an element of surprise about Sambo ; the solemn, black, bullet-head suddenly showing a blaze of white teeth, as he said, “ Yes, sah ! ” and “ Yes, mahm ! ” and laughingly went off to execute orders which he had never in the least understood. There was so much of the big baby about him, too. It is quite certain that Queen T. deliberately made the most foolish blunders in asking for things, in order to witness the suppressed and convulsive amusement of these huge children ; and that, so far from her being annoyed by their laughing at her, she was delighted by it, and covertly watched them when

they thought they were unobserved. She was extremely tickled, too, by the speech of some of them, which was a great deal nearer that of Mr. Bones, of St. James's Hall, than she had at all expected it would be. In fact, in the privacy of her own chamber, she endeavoured once or twice —. But this may be read by her boys, who have enough of their mother's wicked and irreverent ways.

Then, after dinner, we went out to the chairs on the wide and wooden balcony, high up here over the still-flowing river, in the silence of the hot, still, dark night. A grey haze lay along the bed of the stream; the first stars overhead were becoming visible. Far away behind us stretched those dusky hills into which the solemn Dutchmen had disappeared; were they waiting now for the first glimmer of the moon before coming out to begin their ghostly carouse? Could we call to them, over the wide gulf of space, and give them an invitation in our turn? “*Ho! ho! Vanderdecken—Hendrick Hudson—whatever they call you—come, you and your gloomy troop, down the hill-sides and through the valleys—and we will sing you a song*

as you smoke your clays ! The dogs shall not bark at you ; and the children are all in bed ; and when you have smoked and drank deep, you will depart in peace ! Ho ! ho !—Ho ! ho ! ”

Could we not hear some echo from those mystic hills ?—a rumble of thunder, perhaps ?

“ Listen ! ” called out our Bell—but it was not the hoarse response of Vanderdecken that she heard—“ there it is again—in among the trees there—don’t you hear it—*Katy-did ! Katy-did ! Katy-did !* ”

And by-and-by, indeed, the hot, still night-air became filled with these calls in the dark ; and as we watched the moon rise over the hills, our fancies forsook the ghostly Dutchmen, and were busy about that mysterious and distant Katy, whose doings had so troubled the mind of this poor, anxious insect. What was it, then, that Katy did, that is never to be forgotten ? Was it merely that she ran away with some gay young sailor from over the seas ; and you, you miserable, envious, censorious creature, you must needs tell all the neighbours, and give the girl no peace ? And when she came back, too, with her husband

the skipper, and her five bonny boys, and when they both would fain have settled down in their native village, she to her spinning-wheel, and he to his long clay and his dram, you would not even then let the old story rest. *Katy-did!*—*Katy-did!* And what then? Peace, you chatterer, you tell-tale, you scandal-monger; or we will take you to be the imprisoned spirit of some deceased and despicable slanderer, condemned for ever to haunt the darkness of the night with your petulant, croaking cry.

* * * * *

Ho, ho! Vanderdecken! Cannot you send us a faint halloo? The moon is high over the hills now; and the wan light is pouring down into the valleys. Your dark figures, as you come out from the rocks, will throw sharp shadows on the white roads. Why do you draw your cowls over your face?—the night is not chilly at all; and there is no one to see you as you pass silently along. Ho, ho! Vanderdecken! The night is clear. Our hands shall not tremble as we lift the bowl to you. Cannot you send us a faint halloo?

* * * * *

*Saint of this green isle, hear our prayer,
Grant us cool heavens and favouring air :
Blow, breezes, blow, the stream runs fast,
The rapids are near, and the daylight's past !*

—Or is it the tinkling of the sheep-bells on our Surrey downs, with the sunlight shining on the spire of the church, and the children walking between the hedges, the blue sky over all ? Or is it the clear, sweet singing of the choir that we hear ?—falling on the grateful sense like the cool plashing of running water ? Gloomy phantoms have no place on our Surrey downs ; the air is bright there ; there is a sound as of some one singing.

* * * * *

Katy-did ; Katy-did ! Was it on such a night as this that she stole away from her home—and looked pale and troubled as she fled along the lonely road to the side of the stream ? See how the moon lights up the dusky sides of the hills, and touches the rounded foliage of the woods, and flashes a bold line of silver across the broad, smooth river ! There are other lights down there, too—the coloured lights of moving boats ; and will she step on board with a quick, hurried, trembling foot, and hide her pale face and

streaming eyes in her lover's arms? Farewell, farewell, to the small, empty room, and its flowers. Farewell to the simple life and the daily task—for the great, eager, noisy world lies all ahead, unknown and terrible. Swiftly speeds the boat through the moonlight and the mist—there is no sound as it goes—not even a faint and parting cheer from Vanderdecken and his merry men as they solemnly gaze down from the hills.

* * * * *

It is the lieutenant who rouses us from our dreams.

“Lady Sylvia,” says he, “you know the Rhine—were you ever at Rolandseck? Do not you think this place is very like Rolandseck?”

For a second or two she could not answer. Had she ever been to Rolandseck on the Rhine!

CHAPTER XV.

OUR RANCHWOMAN.

FAR away in the north, where the sea is—the real sea, not the decoction of chalk we have around most of our southern English shores—the small boy sits on the rocks, over the clear deep, and carefully baits his hook (five a penny from the village grocer). As soon as he has hidden the blue barb with a crisp white bit of cockle, or with a slice from a spout-fish, or with a mussel of tawny orange and brown, he lowers it into the beautiful water, where nothing is as yet visible but the wavering outline of the rocks, and the moving purple of the sea-weed, and mayhap the glimmer of a star-fish on the sand at unknown depths below. Then suddenly, from the liquid darkness around, comes sailing in, with just one wave of its tail, a saithe!—and the eager eyes of the fisherman follow every movement of his prey,

ready to prompt the sudden twitch. But now the fish begins to play the hypocrite. He does not at all make straight for the tempting morsel suspended there ; but glides this way and that by the side of it, and under it, and over it, pretending all the while to pay no attention to it whatsoever. Occasionally he seems to alter his mind ; he makes a dart at the bait—coming right on with his eyes staring and his mouth agape—and then, again, the youthful fisherman says something about *rich-an-dhiaoul* as he sees the narrow green back of the saithe shoot down again into the deeps. But the doom is near, and certain.

Now this was the way in which our Bell proceeded to take possession of that tempting property that was waiting for her at Colorado. She was never tired of suggesting that we should go to this place and that place, rather than that her legitimate curiosity should be satisfied as to her new home. Her eyes went down to New Orleans, and then went up to Montreal, but were scarcely ever turned due west. And when we, who rather feared that she was proposing these diversions for our sakes alone, remonstrated with her, and

pointed out that she would have ample opportunity of visiting the great lakes and Canada on her way back at the expiry of her year of banishment, you should have seen the light that came suddenly into her face. She seemed already to imagine herself free.

“Take a roundabout way home?” exclaimed the young matron, with proud eyes. “I think not. The moment my year is out, you will see if I don’t come home straighter than any crow that ever flew. If I could only go up to the top of the mountains—and spread my wings there—and make one swoop across the plains, and another swoop across the Atlantic——”

“Stopping at New York, of course, for a biscuit.”

“——you would see how soon I should be in England. Just fancy the first evening we shall spend all together again. Lady Sylvia, you will come to us that evening!”

“I hope so,” said Lady Sylvia, with a startled look—she had been dreaming.

And so, in pursuit of these idle vagaries, we left West Point, and ascended the Hudson a bit

by boat, and then landed and got into a train which most kindly kept by the side of the river as it whirled us along. The carriage was a comfortable one, with arm-chairs on pedestals by the windows, and with small tables for our books, fruit, and what not ; and while the lieutenant had passed along to the smoking-room to have a cigar and some iced drink on this blazing hot day, the women-folk amused themselves by spreading out on the table a whole store of trinkets belonging to a youthful merchant attached to the car, and by selecting a vast number of perfectly useless presents for people at home. It was an agreeable occupation enough, to connect the names of those who were far away with those bits of ivory, and photograph frames, and puzzles ; and Queen T. faithfully undertook to deliver all these little gifts, with appropriate messages. The representation that they were going to carry those trumpery things about with them all over America, that their boxes would be encumbered, that the things themselves would be broken, and that the proper time for purchasing presents was just before sailing from New York, met with that absolute

indifference which was generally accorded to the advice of a person who had by this time subsided into the position of being a mere chronicler of the doings of the party, and who had found out that in this land of liberty it was as unsafe for him to open his mouth as it was in his own home in England.

“My dear Lady Sylvia,” said Queen T. as this Swiss-looking railway-car was rumbling along towards Saratoga through a dusty and wooded country that looked parched enough under the blue sky, “I guess I feel just real mean.”

Lady Sylvia’s eyes asked what this extraordinary language meant.

“Don’t you?” she continued. “Here are we going into Saratoga in the company of a ranch-woman, a farmeress, a stock-raiser, a bowie-knifer. What was it the Judge said in New York about Saratoga?—that we should find there ‘a blaze of wealth, beauty, and culture such as was not to be found in any capital in Europe?’ and of course it would have been bad enough in any case for us simple country-folk to go into such a whirl of fashionable life; but with one of the wild

desperadoes of Colorado — what will they think of us ? ”

“ I guess you want a tarnation lickin,” said the stock-raiser, calmly. “ Buffalo Jack, where’s my cowhide ? ”

Buffalo Jack, being immersed in time-tables, would pay no heed to her nonsense ; but Lady Sylvia was heard to say that the conduct of a ranchwoman in coming to Saratoga was deserving of respect rather than ridicule, for she would no doubt learn something of manners before going back to her bowie-knives and cattle.

What, then, was this big, busy town through which we drove—with its broad thoroughfares, deep dust, green trees, and huge hotels ?

We look at the jewellers’ shops, and the *cafés*, and the promenaders ; and one cries out “ Baden-Baden ! ”

We catch a glimpse of some public gardens, and coloured lamps, and avenues, and another calls out, “ It is Kreuznach ; and the band is playing ! ”

We whirl along another spacious thoroughfare, and a third calls out, “ It is the Boulevard

Poissonnière!" when it is mildly suggested that after all this may be no more Kreuznach than the Hudson was the Rhine; and that it might be better, on the whole, to call it Saratoga.

It was with a great diffidence that we ascended the steps of the monster hotel, and found ourselves in a large central hall. We were conscious that we were travel-stained; and had scarcely sufficient moral courage to ask the clerk for rooms. We knew that the smart young men standing around were regarding us; and oh! so snowy were their white neck-ties—which they wore in the middle of the day. And then, to make matters worse, this pernicious ranchwoman had donned in the morning a costume of light blue serge, in which she had done some yachting the year before; and we knew—though we dared not look—that there must be stains of the salt sea foam on it. Finally, our inward rage and humiliation were complete when, having been furnished with our keys, we entered the lift to be conveyed to the floors above; for here we found ourselves confronted by three young ladies—but the human imagination refuses to recall the splendour of the

attire of these angels in human form. Each of them had a jeweller's shop on her hands.

However, we dried our eyes in secret, and made as brave an appearance as was possible when we assembled together in the saloon below.

"Look here, child," said Queen T. to our ranchwoman, as she lifted a white object from the table. "Do you see that? That is a fork. You take it in your left hand, and you lift your food to your mouth with it, instead of with your fingers, as you have been accustomed."

"It's a thorough good lickin' you want," said this child of nature, doggedly. It was all we could get out of her.

Then we went out for a drive; and a mighty fine show we made, with our green gauze curtains to keep out the dust, and *with our two horses*. The lieutenant was perched up beside the driver. Occasionally he disappeared from our sight altogether, hidden away by the dense clouds of brown dust that came rolling in the wake of some carriage. And the further we went out into the country the deeper the dust in the roads appeared to become, until our German friend had assumed

the guise of a baker, and there was scarcely any difference between the colour of his hat, his beard, and his coat. But we came to our journey's end at last, for we reached a series of deep gullies in the sand: and in each of these gullies, which were a good bit apart, were some more or less temporary buildings, mostly of wood; and at each of them we found a gentleman in a tall black hat, who in the most courteous manner offered us a glass of the saline water he was prepared to sell, informed us of its chemical qualities, presented us with a prospectus of his company, and was generally most affable. It was a terrible temptation. We might have remained there all day, drinking gallons of the water—for nothing. And, indeed, we began to pride ourselves on our connoisseurship; and if the present writer had only the various prospectuses by him at present, he could pick out the particular spring which we unanimously declared to be the finest. We had to tear ourselves away.

“After all,” said Bell, with a sigh, “they manage these things better at Carlsbad.”

Then we drove away again through the thick

sand, and in process of time found ourselves on the broad, bare avenue which leads out to Saratoga Lake. And here we found ourselves still further ashamed, notwithstanding our two horses, by the fashion in which the people shot by us in their light little carriages, their toes perched up, their swift little trotters apparently running away with them. In spite of the dust, we could see the diamonds flashing on the fingers, and shirts, and neck-ties of the brown-faced, brown-bearded gentlemen who appeared to have come right up from California. We reached the lake too—a large, calm extent of silvery grey water, becoming somewhat melancholy in the evening light. We gathered some flowers, and bethought ourselves of another lake, set far away among lonely woods, that we had seen in the bygone days.

“Once upon a time,” says Queen T., as we are standing on the height, and looking abroad over the expanse of water, “I can remember there were two young people sailing out on a lake like this, in a small boat, in the moonlight. And one of them proposed to give up his native country in order that he might marry an English girl. And

I think it is the same girl that has now to give up her native country—for a time—for the sake of her children. Were you ever at Ellesmere, Lady Sylvia ?”

Lady Sylvia had never been to Ellesmere ; but she guessed why these things were spoken of. As for Bell, she was putting the gathered flowers in a book ; they were for her children.

We drove back to dine in the large saloon, with its flashing lights and its troops of black waiters. We were more than ever impressed by the beautiful attire and the jewellery of the ladies and gentlemen who were living in Saratoga ; and in the evening, when all the doors of the saloons were thrown open, and when the band began to play in the square inside the hotel, and when these fashionable people began to promenade along the balcony which runs all round the intramural space of grass and trees, we were more than ever reminded of some evening entertainment in a Parisian public garden. Our plainly dressed women-folk were out of place in this gay throng, that paced up and down under the brilliant lamps. As for our ranch-woman she affected to care nothing at all for the

music and this bright spectacle of people walking about the balcony in the grateful coolness of the summer night, but went down the steps into the garden and busied herself with trying to find out the whereabouts of a katy-did that was sounding his incessant note in the darkness. What was it they played? Probably Offenbach; but we did not heed much. The intervals of silence were pleasanter.

But was it not kind of those two gentlemen, both of whom wore ample frock-coats and straw hats, to place their chairs just before us on the lawn, so that we could not but overhear their conversation? And what was it all about?

“Pennsylvania’s alive—jest alive,” said the elder of the two. “The miners are red-hot—yes, *Sir!* You should have heard me at Manch Chunk—twenty thousand people, and a barbecue in the woods, and a whole ox roasted—biggest thing since ‘Tippecanoe and Tyler too.’ When I told ’em that the bloated bondholders robbed ’em of their hard-earned wages, to roll in wealth, and dress in purple and fine linen, like Solomon in all his glory, and the lilies of the valley, you should

have heerd 'em shout—I thought they would tear their shirts. The bond is the sharp-pinted stick to poke up the people.”

“And how about Philadelphia?” said the other.

“Well, I was not quite so hefty there. There’s a heap of bonds in Philadelphia and there’s no use in arousing prejudices—painful feelings—misunderstandings. It aint politics. What’s good for one sile aint good for another sile. You sow your seed as the land lays—that’s politics. Where people haint go no bonds, there’s where to go in heavy on the bondholders. But in Philadelphia I giv it to 'em on Reform, and corruption, and the days of the Revolution that tried men’s souls, and that sort o’ thing—and wishin’ we had Washington back again. That’s always a tremendous pint, about Washington; and when people are skittish on great questions, you fall back on the Father of his Country. You see——”

“But Washington’s dead,” objected the disciple.

“Of course he’s dead,” said the other, triumphantly, “and that’s why he’s a living issue in a canvas. In politics, the deader a man is, the more you can do with him. He can’t talk back.”

“And about Massachusetts now?” the humble inquirer asked.

“Well, those Yankees don’t take too much stock in talk. You can’t do much with the bonds and corruption in Massachusetts. There you touch ’em up on whiskey and the nigger. The evils of intemperance and the oppression of the coloured brother—those are the two bowers in Massachusetts.”

“Rhode Island?”

“Oh, well, Rhode Island is a one-horse state where everybody pays taxes and goes to church; and all you’ve got to do is to worry ’em about the Pope. Say the Pope’s comin’ to run the machine.”

Then these two also relapse into silence; and we are left free to pursue our own speculations.

And indeed our chief manageress and monitress made no secret of her wish to leave Saratoga as soon as possible. We had taken it *en route*, out of mere curiosity; it was obvious to her that she could gain no moral here to preach at the head of her poor pupil. These lights and gay costumes and languid quadrilles were the mere glorification

of idleness; and she had brought this suffering one to America to show her—in our rapid transit from place to place—something of the real hardships that human nature had to fight against and endure, the real agony that parting, and distance, and the struggle for life, could inflict on the sons and the daughters of men. Saratoga was not at all to our liking. There was no head for any discourse to be got out of it. Onwards—onwards—was her cry.

So it was that on the next day, or the next again, we bade farewell to this gay haunt of pleasure, and set out for grimmer latitudes. We were bound for Boston. Here, indeed, was a fruitful theme for discourse; and during the long hours, as we rolled through a somewhat Bavarian-looking country—with white wooden houses set amid that perpetual forest that faded away into the hills around the horizon—we heard a great deal about the trials of the early settlers and their noble fortitude and self-reliance. You would have fancied that this lecturess was a passionate Puritan in her sympathies; though we who knew her better were well aware that she had a sneaking

liking for gorgeous ritual, and that she would have given her ears to be allowed to introduce a crucifix into our respectable village church. That did not matter. The stern manners and severe discipline of the refugees were at the moment all she could admire, and somehow we began to feel that, if it had not been for our gross tyranny and oppression, the *Mayflower* would never have sailed.

But a graver lesson still was to be read to us. We could not understand why, after a time, the train was continually being stopped at short intervals: and we naturally grew impatient. The daylight left us, and the lights in the carriage were not bright enough to allow us to read. We were excessively hungry, and were yet many miles away from Boston. We had a right to speak bitterly of this business.

Then, as the stoppages became more lengthened, and we had speech of people on the line, rumours began to circulate through the carriages. An accident had happened to the train just ahead of ours. There was a vague impression that some one had been killed; but nothing more.

It was getting on towards midnight when we

passed a certain portion of the line ; and here the place was all lit up by men going about with lanterns. There was a sound of hammering in the vague obscurity outside this sphere of light. Then we crept into the station, and there was an excited air about the people as they conversed with each other.

And what was it all about? Queen T. soon got to know. Out of all the people in the train, only one had been killed—a young girl of fifteen : she was travelling with her father and mother ; they had not been hurt at all. The corpse was in a room in the station ; the parents were there too. They said she was their only child.

We went on again ; and somehow there was now no more complaining over the delay. It was past midnight when we reached Boston. The streets looked lonely enough in the darkness. But we were thinking less of the great city we had just entered than of the small country station set far away in the silent forest, where that father and mother were sitting, with the dead body of their child.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN INROAD OF PALE FACES.

BUT we were not always to be preached at by this miniature Madame Solomon. We had not come three or four thousand miles to be lectured up hill and down dale. Even our stern teacher herself forgot her moralities when, after a long night's rain, Boston received us with breezy blue skies, cool winds, and a flashing sunlight that broke on the stirring trees. We breathed once more—after the heat of New York and the dust of Saratoga. We walked along the pavements, and, as we had always been told that Boston was peculiarly English, we began to perceive an English breadth of frame on the part of the men, an English freshness of complexion on the part of the women. We shut our eyes to the fact that the shops were more the shops of Brussels than of Brighton. Surely these were English clouds that swiftly

crossed the sky; English trees and parks that shone fair in their greenness; an English lake that was rippling in waves before the brisk breeze? And then, again, away down in the business part of the city, amid tall warehouses and great blocks of stores, how could we fail to notice that that was the Atlantic itself which we suddenly caught glimpses of at the end of the thoroughfares, just as if some one, tired of the perpetual grey and red of the houses, had taken a huge brush and dashed in a stroke of brilliant cobalt across the narrow opening?

“Ships go from here to England, do they not?” asked Lady Sylvia, once, as we were driving by a bit of the harbour.

“Certainly.”

She was looking rather wistfully at the blue water, and the moored steamers, and the smaller craft that were sailing about.

“In a fortnight one could be back in Liverpool?”

“Doubtless.”

But here our Bell broke in, laying her hand gently on the hand of her friend.

“You must not think of going back already, Lady Sylvia,” she said, with a smile. “We have got to show you all the wonders of our western country yet. How could you go back without seeing a buffalo hunt?”

“Oh,” said she, hastily, and the beautiful pale face flushed somewhat. “I was not thinking of that. It was a mere fancy. It seems so long since we left England—and we have come so great a way—that it is strange to think one could be back in Surrey in a fortnight.”

“We cannot allow you to play truant, you know,” said Queen T., in her gentle way. “What would every one say if we allowed you to go back without seeing Niagara?”

“I assure you I was not thinking of such a thing,” said Lady Sylvia, seriously—as if she were afraid of grievously offending Niagara—“would not every one laugh if I were to show homesickness so soon?”

But all the same we could see that she never looked at these blue waters of the Atlantic without a certain wistfulness; and as it happened we were pretty much by the seaside at this time.

For first of all we went down to Manchester, a small, scattered, picturesque watering-place overlooking Massachusetts Bay—the Swiss-looking cottages of wood dotted down anywhere on the high rocks above the strand. And when the wild sunset had died out of the western skies—the splendid colours had been blinding our sight until we turned for refuge to the dark, intense greens of the trees in shadow—we had our chairs out on the verandah, up here on the rocks, over the sea. We heard the splashing of the waves below. We could vaguely make out the line of the land running away out to Cape Cod; and now the twin lights of the Sisters began to shoot their orange rays into the purple dusk. Then the moon rose; and the Atlantic grew grey; and there was a pale radiance on the rocks around us. Our good friends talked much of England that long, still, beautiful night; and now it seemed a place very far apart from us, that we should scarcely be able to recognise when we saw it again.

Then we went to see some other friends at Newport, arriving just in time to get a glimpse of the afternoon-drive before the people and their

smart little vehicles were partly hidden. The next morning we drove round by the sea; and now the sun was burning on the almost smooth water, and there was a fresh smell of seaweed, and the tiny ripples curled crisp and white along the pebbly bays. Our Bell began to praise the sea. Here was no churned chalk; but the crystal seawater of the northern shores that she loved. And when she turned her eyes inland, and found occasional glimpses of moorland and rock, she appealed to Lady Sylvia to say if she did not think it was like some part of Scotland, although, to be sure, there was no heather here.

“I have never been in Scotland,” said Lady Sylvia, gently, and looking down. “I—I almost thought we should have gone this year.”

There was no tremor at all in her voice; she had bravely nerved herself on the spur of the moment.

“You must go next year; Mr. Balfour will be so proud to show his native country to you,” said Queen T., very demurely; but we others could see some strange meaning in her eyes—some quick, full expression of confident triumph and joy.

And how is it possible to avoid some brief but grateful mention of the one beautiful day we spent at Cambridge—or rather, outside Cambridge—in a certain garden there? It was a Sunday, fair, and calm, and sweet-scented ; for there were cool winds blowing through the trees, and bringing the odours of flowers into the shadowed verandah. Was not that bit of landscape over there, too—the soft green hill, with its patches of trees, the hedges and fields, the breezy blue sky with its floating clouds of white—a pleasant suggestion of Surrey? There was one sitting with us there who is known and well-beloved wherever, all over the wide world, the English tongue is spoken ; and if that gracious kindness, which seemed to be extended to all things, animate and inanimate, was more particularly shown to our poor stricken patient, who could wonder who had ever seen her sensitive mouth and pathetic eyes? Of whom was it written—

*Soft as descending wings fell the calm of the hour on her spirit ;
Something within her said, "At length thy trials are ended" ?*

If she could not quite say that as yet, her sorrows

were for the moment at least forgotten ; and she sat content, and pleased, and grateful. And then we had dinner in an old-fashioned room of the old-fashioned house, and much discourse of books ; the mute listener, having won the favour of all, being far more frequently addressed than anybody else. The full moon was shining on the trees when we went out into the clear night. It was shining, too, on the Charles River, when we had driven on along the white road ; and here, of course, we stopped to look at the wonderful picture. For beyond this flashing of silver on the rippling water, the river was bounded by a mass of houses, that were black as midnight in the shadow ; and here and there a dusky spire rose solemnly into the lambent sky ; while down below there was a line of lamps, burning in the dark like a string of ruddy jewels. These were the only points of colour—those points of orange ; all else was blue and silver—a dream of Venice.

What more is to be said about Boston, before we leave it for the mystic woods and lakes of Chingachgook, whose ghost we hope to see emerge from the dim forest, in company with that of the

simple-minded Deer-slayer? Well, a word must be said about the great thoughtfulness of our good friends there, who took us to see every place and thing of note—except Bunker's Hill. They most scrupulously avoided all mention of Bunker's Hill—just as a Scotchman would rather die than mention Bannockburn in the south—and, to tell the truth, we never saw the place at all. This is much to be regretted; for the visiting of such scenes is most useful in refreshing one's knowledge of history; and, indeed, this courtesy on the part of our Boston friends led to a good deal of confusion afterwards. For, one evening up in Canada, when Bell had been busy with her maps, she suddenly cried out—

“Why, we never went to see Bunker's Hill.”

“Neither we did,” was the reply.

“And it is close to Boston!”

“Assuredly.”

She remained in deep reflection for a moment or two; and then she said, in absolute innocence—

“I do wonder that a nation that fought so well, North and South, should show such a sensitive-

ness as that. They never said a word about Bunker's Hill when we were at Boston. You would have thought the humiliation of that small defeat was quite forgotten by this time ; for I am quite sure the South would not speak about it ; and I am quite sure the North is as proud of Stonewall Jackson now as the South can be."

Stonewall Jackson ?—Bunker's Hill ?

"What do you mean?" said Queen T., severely, for she thought the young wife had taken leave of her senses.

"Well," said she, simply, and rather ungrammatically, "if the North was beaten, they fought well enough afterwards ; and when they can point to such battles as Gettysburg, they need not be afraid of the South remembering Bunker's Hill against them."

This was too awful. She was the mother of two children. But we wrote to our friends in Boston, begging them in the future not to let any of their English friends go through the town without telling them what Bunker's Hill was all about.

Next, a word about the singular purity of the

atmosphere ; at mid-day, as we stood in the street or walked across the Common, we could make out with the naked eye the planet Venus, shining clear and brilliant in the blue overhead.

Finally, a word as to a certain hotel. We had gone there partly because it was conducted on the European plan, and partly because it was said to be the best in America, and we naturally wanted to see what America could do in that way. We came to the conclusion that this hotel was probably the best in America a generation ago : and that its owners, proud of its reputation, had determined that it should never be interfered with—not even by an occasional broom. It was our friend the Uhlan who waxed the most ferocious. He came down in a towering rage the first morning after our arrival.

“The best hotel in America?” he cried. “I tell you, we have no room at all—it is a box—it is a miserable hole, without light—it is full of mosquitoes—it looks into a sort of well, over the kitchen, and it is hotter than an oven—and the noise of the quarrelling in the kitchen—and I think a woman dying of—what do you call it?—asthma?”

—in the next room——. No, I will not stay here another night for a thousand pounds ! ”

However, we pacified him ; and he did stay another night, and was richly rewarded. He came down on the second morning with a pleased air. He had a sheet of writing-paper in his hand, on which were displayed a number of strange objects.

“ Ha ! ” said he, with a proud smile, “ it is so kind of them to let us know the secrets of the American ladies. These things lie thick all over the room : but they are very small ; and you cannot easily see them for the dust. But they are very strange—oh, very strange ; did you ever see hair-pins so small as these ? ”

He showed us a beautiful variety of these interesting objects, some of them so minute as almost to be invisible to the naked eye. Almost equally minute, too, were certain india-rubber bands. Then that tiny brush, tipped with black ; what was that for ? Surely the thousand virgins of Cologne must have in turn inhabited this room, to have left behind them so many souvenirs.

“ You have no business with those things,” said Bell, angrily. “ They don’t belong to you.”

“To whom, then?” said he, meekly. “To the Crown? Is it treasure trove? But one thing I know very well. When we go away from this pretty hotel—from this, oh! very charming hotel, we will not shake the dust from our feet, because that would be quite unnecessary. They have enough; don’t you think so?”

And then we set out on our travels once more; and during a long and beautiful day went whirling away northward through a rough, hilly, and wooded country, intersected by deep ravines, and showing here and there a clear stream running along its pebbly bed. Here and there, too, on the hills the woods were already beginning to show a yellow tinge; while at rare intervals we descried a maple that had anticipated the glowing colours of the Indian summer and become like a flame of rose-red fire among the dark green of the pines. It was a picturesque country enough—this wilderness of rocks, and streams, and forest; and it might have been possible to begin and imagine the red men back again in this wilderness that they once haunted, but that, from time to time, we suddenly came on a clear-

ing that showed a lot of bare wooden shanties, and the chances were that the place rejoiced in some such name as Cuttingsville. Cuttingsville! But perhaps, after all, there is a fitness in things; and it would have been a worse sort of desecration to steal one of the beautiful Indian names from some neighbouring stream and tack it on to this tag-rag habitation of squatters.

The evening sun was red behind the dark green of the trees when, at Glen Falls, we left the railway, and mounted on the top of a huge coach set on high springs. Away went the four horses; and we found ourselves swinging this way and that as if we were being buffeted about by the five tides that meet off the Mull of Cantire. It was a pleasant ride, nevertheless; for it was now the cool of the evening, and we were high above the dust, and we were entering a country not only beautiful in itself but steeped in all sorts of historical and romantic tradition. Far over there on the right—the last spur of the Adirondacks—was the mountain held by the French artillery to command the military road through these wilds, and bearing the name of French

mountain to this day. Ahead of us, hidden away in the dark woods, was the too famous Bloody Pond. And Fort William Henry?—of a surety, friend, these lovely damsels shall be safely housed to-night, and the dogs of Mingoes may carry the news to Montcalm that his prey has escaped him!

It was a plank road that carried us away into the forest, and the monotonous fall of the horses' hoofs was the only sound that broke the stillness of the night and of the woods. The first stars came out in the pale grey overhead. Our lamps were lit now; and there was a golden glory around us—a blaze in the midst of the prevailing dusk.

And now the forest became still more dense, and the road wound in an intricate fashion through the trees. For our part, we could see no path at all. The horses seemed perpetually on the point of rushing headlong into the forest, when lo! a sharp turn would reveal another bit of road, it also seeming to disappear in the woods. And then the pace at which this chariot, with its blazing aureole, went flashing through the darkness!

Mile after mile we rattled on, and the distant lake was nowhere visible. Not thus did the crafty Hurons steal through these trees to dog the footsteps of the noble Delawares. We were almost ashamed to think that there was no danger surrounding us, and that our chief regard was about supper.

Suddenly there was a wild yell ahead, and at the same moment a black object dashed across the heads of our leaders. Then we caught sight of a vehicle underneath the lamps; and there was a shout of laughter as it flew onwards after that narrow escape. The sharp turn in the road had very nearly produced another massacre of pale-faces in the neighbourhood of Fort William Henry.

“Do you remember that night at Keswick?” our Uhlan said, with a laugh. “That was near, too; was it not, Madame? And now this great coach—we should have run clean over that wagonette—as you described the big steamers running over a small schooner—and the driver, did you see how smart he was in taking his leaders off the planks? It was very well done—

very well done—he is a smart fellow ; and I will give him another cigar, if it does not annoy you, Lady Sylvia.”

“It is very pleasant in the night air,” said our courteous guest. “And indeed I am accustomed at home to the smell of pipes—which is a great deal worse.”

And so The Lilacs was still her home? She betrayed no embarrassment in speaking of the nest she had forsaken ; but then she was sheltered by the darkness of the night.

Then at last the long, delightful drive was done ; and there was a great blaze of lamps over a broad flight of stairs and a spacious hall. We turned before we entered. Down there in the dusk, and hemmed around by shadowy hills, lay the silent waters of Lake George.

CHAPTER XVII.

A COMPLETE HISTORY OF CANADA.

THERE were two people standing at a window and looking abroad over the troubled waters of Lake George—or Lake Horican, as they preferred to call it on this colourless and cheerless morning. The scene was a sad one enough. For far away the hills were pale under the clouded sky; and there were white mists stealing over the sombre forests, and the green islands lay desolate in the midst of the leaden sea that plashed coldly on their stony shores. Were they thinking—these two—as they watched the mournful greys of the morning change and interchange with the coming and going of the rain-clouds—that the great mother Nature was herself weeping for her red children gone away for ever from this solitary lake and these silent woods? This was their domain. They had fished in these waters—they had

hidden in these dense forests from the glare of the sun—for ages before the ruthless invader had come from over the seas. Or was it of a later race that these two were thinking—of persons and deeds that had first become familiar to them in the pleasant summer-time—as the yacht lay becalmed on the golden afternoons—with the mountains of Skye grown mystical in the perfect stillness? Was it of Judith Hutter, for example, and Hurry Harry, and the faithful Uncas, who had somehow got themselves so mixed up with that idling voyage that one almost imagined the inhabitants of Tobermory would be found to address one as a pale-face when the vessel drew near the shore? One of the two spoke.

“I think,” said she slowly—but there was a peculiar proud light in her eyes—“I think I might this very minute telegraph to Mr. Balfour to come right over by the next steamer.”

The companion of this person was not in the habit of expressing surprise. He had got accustomed to the swift and occult devices of her small and subtle brain. If the member for Englebury had at that moment arrived by coach, and walked

up the front steps of the hotel, he would have betrayed no astonishment whatever. So he merely said—

“Why?”

“You will see,” she continued, “that her first thought about this lake will be its likeness to some other lake that she has known. She is always looking back to England. Last night she spoke quite cheerfully about going home. If Mr. Balfour were suddenly to meet us at Montreal—”

“Have you telegraphed to him?” demands the other sternly; for he is never sure as to the madness of which this woman is capable.

“No.”

“Nor written to him?”

“No.”

“Then don’t be a fool. Do you mean to say that two people who find their married life so unbearable that they must needs separate are at once to be reconciled because one of them takes a trip across the Atlantic? Is that your remedy for married misery—your salt-water cure—thirty guineas return, with three pounds a head for the wine bill?”

“It was only one of them who wished for a separation,” says this gentle schemer, with a happy smile, “and already she knows a little of what separation is like. Don’t I see it? And the further we go—the more varied things we see—I know that her heart is yearning all the more to go back to its home. She speaks now of New York as if it were continents and continents away. It is not a question of time—and of your thirty guineas—it is a question of long days and nights, and solitary thinking, and strange places, and strange people, and the thought of the increasing labour of one’s going back. And just fancy when we have gone away across the wide prairies——oh, I know! You will see the change in her face when we turn towards England again!”

Her companion is not at all carried away by this burst of enthusiasm.

“Perhaps,” he observes, “you will be good enough to say at what point Mr. Balfour is suddenly to appear—like a fairy in a pantomime—or a circus rider through a hoop.”

“I never said he was to appear anywhere,” is the petulant reply.

“No; and therefore he is all the more likely to appear. At Niagara? Are we to increase the current with a flood of tears?”

“I tell you I have neither telegraphed nor written to him,” she says. “I don’t know where he is—and I don’t care.”

“Then we are determined to have our cure complete? *Lady Sylvia Balfour before three months of moral scolding: the same after the three months: the recipe forwarded for eighteenpence in postage-stamps—apply to Professor Stickleback, on the top of Box-hill, Surrey.* There is one thing quite certain—that, if you are the means of reconciling these two, they will both of them most cordially hate you for the rest of their life.”

“I cannot help that,” is the quiet answer. “One must do what good one can. It isn’t much at the best.”

We were almost the only occupants of the steamer that left the small pier and proceeded to cut its way through the wind-swept waters of the lake. And now, sure enough, these people began to talk about Loch Lomond, and Killarney, and Windermere, and all sorts of other places, just as

if they wished to pander to this poor creature's nostalgia; it was of no use to remind them that the lake was an American lake, with associations of its own, and these far from uninteresting. Very gloomy, however, was the aspect in which Lake Horican now presented itself to us; for the clouds seemed to come closer down, and the low and wooded hills became of a heavier purple, and darker still became the water that was dashed in hurrying waves on the sandy and rocky shore. Then we got into the narrows, and were near enough the hills to see where the forest had been on fire, the charred stems of the trees appearing in the distance like so many vine-stems washed white. The lake opened out again; and on we steamed—the mountains far ahead of us growing of a still deeper purple as if a fearful storm were impending over them. Suddenly Lady Sylvia uttered a light cry. She had by accident turned. And lo! behind us there was a great blaze of sunlight falling on the hills and the water—the lake a sheet of dazzling silver—the islands of a brilliant and sunny green—one keen flash of blue visible among the floating clouds. And it was

then, too, we saw an eagle slowly sailing over the russet woods—the only living thing visible in this wilderness of water and forest. The sunlight spread. There were glimmerings of silver in the heavy clouds lying over the region of the Adirondacks. A pale glow crossed from time to time our drying decks. When we landed to undertake the short railway journey between Lake George and Lake Champlain, we found ourselves in hot sunshine.

Lake Champlain, too, was fair, and sunny, and green; and the waters that the steamer churned were as clear as those of Schaffhausen; while the windy shreds of cloud that floated by the Adirondacks were of the lightest and fleeciest. But there were storms brewing somewhere. As the day waned, we had sudden fits of purple darkness, and dashes of rain went sweeping along the lake. In the evening there was a wild smoke of red in the west, behind the pallid hills, and this ruddy glare here and there touched the grey-green waters of the lake with a dusky fire, and made the hull of one boat which we could see in the distance gleam like some crimson stone. As we

sat there, watching the lurid sunset, and the darkening waters, we had dreams of an excursion to be made in the days to come. When Bell's long exile in the west was over, we were to meet somewhere about this point. We were suddenly to disappear from human ken in the wilds of the Adirondacks. We should live on the produce of our own guns and fishing-rods; we should sleep in the log-huts on the cool summer nights; we should become as dexterous as Indians in the use of our canoes. We had heard vague rumours of similar excursions through these virgin wilds; why should not we also plunge into the forest primeval?

Mr. von Rosen said nothing at all when he heard this proposal; but he laughed, and looked at his wife.

“When I am set free to get back to England,” said the ranchwoman, with great gentleness—for she was obviously profiting by her brief companionship with civilized folks—“I don't think—I really do not think—that you will catch me foolin' around here.”

In the mean time, however, she was just as

eager to see everything as anybody else. Look, for example, at what happened on the very first morning after our arrival at Montreal. We had, on the previous evening, left Lake Champlain at Plattsburgh, and got into the train there. We had made our first acquaintance with the Canadians in the persons of four as promising-looking scoundrels as could be found in any part of the world, who conversed in guttural French in whispers, and kept their unwashed faces and collarless throats so near together as to suggest a conspiracy to murder. We had parted from these gentlemen as soon as the train had crossed the St. Lawrence bridge and got into Montreal, and we had reached our hotel about midnight. Now, what must this German do but insist on every one getting up at a nameless hour in the morning, to start away by train and intercept a boat coming down over the Lachine Rapids. His wife assented, of course; and then the other two women were not to be outdone. A solemn tryst was made. Ridicule was unavailing. And so it happened that there was a hushed hurrying to and fro in the early dawn, and two or three wretched people,

who ought to have been in bed, went shivering out into the cold air. As for the Lachine Rapids, the present writer has nothing to say about them. They are said to be very fine, and there is a picture of them in every bookseller's shop in Canada. It is also asserted that when the steamer goes whirling down, the passengers have a pleasing sensation of terror. All he knows is that, as he was sitting comfortably at breakfast, four objects made their appearance, and these turned out to be human beings, with blue faces and helpless hands. When they had got thawed somewhat, and able to open their mouths without breaking bones, they said that the descent of the rapids was a very fine thing indeed.

Nor was it possible for one to learn anything of the character of the Canadian nation, because of these insatiable sightseers. The writer of these pages, finding that he would have two whole days to spend in Montreal, had proposed to himself to make an exhaustive study of the political situation in Canada, and to supplement that by a comparison between the manners, customs, costume, and domestic habits of the

Canadians and those of the Americans. It was also his intention to devote a considerable portion of this time to a careful inquiry as to the number of Canadians who would prefer separation from Great Britain. But these projected studies, which would have been of immense value to the world at large, were rendered impossible by the conduct of this group of frivolous tourists, who were simply bent on profitlessly enjoying themselves. And this they seemed to do with a great goodwill, for they were delighted with the cool, fresh air and the brilliant atmosphere, which gave to this city a singularly bright and gay appearance. They were charmed with the prettily decorated cabs in the street. When they entered the Cathedral of Notre Dame, it seemed quite appropriate to find colours and gilding there that in England would have suggested a certain institution in Leicester Square. Then we had to climb to the tower to have a view over the beautiful, bright city, with its red brick houses set amid green trees, its one or two remaining tin domes glinting back the morning sunlight, its bold sweep of the St. Lawrence reflecting the blue sky.

What was that, too, about the vagus nerve, when the striking of the great bell seemed to fill our chests with a choking sound? Our ranchwoman was not ordinarily scientific in her talk, but she was rather proud of the vagus nerve. Indeed, we grew to have a great affection for that useful monitor within, of whose existence we had not heard before; and many a time afterwards, when our desire for dinner was becoming peremptory, we only recognized the friendly offices of this unknown bellman, who was doubtless, in his own quiet way, sounding the tocsin of the soul.

In fact, these trivial-minded people would have nothing to do with a serious study of the Canadian character. They said that they approved of the political institutions of this country because they got French bread at dinner. They were quite sure that the Canadians were most loyal subjects of the Crown, and that everything was for the best, simply because some very kind friends called on them with a couple of carriages and whirled them away up to the summit of Mount Royal Park and showed them the great plain beneath, and the city, and the broad river. They went

mad about that river. You would have fancied that Bell had been born a barge-woman and had spent her life in shooting rapids. We knew that the old-fashioned song of our youth kept continually coming back to her idle fancy, for we heard faint snatches of it hummed from time to time when the rest of us were engaged in talk.

*Why should we yet our sail unfurl?
There is not a breath the blue wave to curl;
But when the wind blows off the shore,
Oh, sweetly we'll rest the weary oar—*

* * * *

*Utaway tide! this trembling moon
Shall see us float over thy surges soon—
Saint of this green isle, hear our prayer,
Grant us cool breezes and favouring air—*

* * * *

*Blow, breezes, blow, the stream runs fast,
The rapids are near, and the daylight's past—*

And the daylight was indeed past when we left Montreal; for these unconscionable tourists insisted on starting at the unholy hour of ten at night, so that they should accomplish some foolish plan or other. It was an atrocious piece of cruelty. We got into a sleeping-car; and found the bright-

est and cleanest of bunks awaiting us. We were pretty tired, too, with rushing up and down belfry-stairs, and what not. It was no wonder, therefore, that we speedily forgot all about our having to get up in the middle of the night at some wretched place called Prescott.

We were summoned back from the calm of dreamland by a hideous noise. We staggered out of the carriage, and found ourselves in a small and empty railway station at two in the morning. But the more we rubbed our eyes the more we were bewildered. Everything was wrapped in a cold, thick fog, so that the train was but the phantom of a train, and we seemed to each other as ghosts. The only light was from a solitary lamp that sent its dazzling glare into the fog, and seemed to gather about it a golden smoke. Then these fierce cries in the distance?

“ Dan’l’s? Who’s for Dan’l’s? All aboard for Dan’l’s?”

The poor shivering wretches stared helplessly at each other, like ghosts waiting for Charon to take them somewhither.

“ Dan’l’s?” again resounded that unearthly

cry, which had a peculiar rising inflection on the second syllable. “*Who’s for Dan’l’s? All aboard for Dan’l’s?*”

Then it crossed the mind of the bewildered travellers that perhaps this Dan’l’s was some hostelry in the neighbourhood—some haven of refuge from this sea of fog—and so they stumbled along until they made out the glare of another lamp, and here was an omnibus with its door flung wide open.

“*Dan’l’s?*” sung out the plaintive voice again. “*Who’s for Dan’l’s hotel? All aboard for Dan’l’s?*”

We clambered into the small vehicle, and sat down, bound for the unknown. Then the voice outside grew sharp. “ALL ABOARD!” it cried; the door was banged to; and away we went through the fog, plunging and reeling, as if we were climbing the bed of a stream.

Then we got into the hostelry, and there was an air of drowsiness about it that was ominous. The lights were low. There was no coffee-room open.

“I think,” said the lieutenant, rubbing his hands cheerfully, “I think we could not do better than

have some brandy or whisky, and hot water, before going to bed."

The clerk, who had just handed him his key, politely intimated that he could have nothing of that sort—nothing of any sort, in fact. The lieutenant turned on him.

"Do you mean to tell me that this is a temperance house?" he said, with a stare.

"No, it ain't," said the clerk. "Not generally. But it is on Sunday; and this is Sunday.

It certainly was three o'clock on Sunday morning.

"Gracious heavens, man!" exclaimed the lieutenant, "is this a civilized country? Don't you know that you will play the very mischief with our vagus nerves?"

The clerk clearly thought he had nothing to do with our vagus nerves, for he simply turned and lowered another lamp. So the lieutenant lit his candle, and departed, muttering to himself.

"Dan'l's?" we heard him growl, as he went up the wooden stair. "All aboard for Dan'l's? Confound me if I ever come within a dozen miles of Dan'l's again!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A THOUSAND ISLANDS.

THE next day was a Sunday, still, and calm, and blue ; and we sat or patiently walked along the wooden pier, waiting for the steamer that was to come up the broad waters of the St. Lawrence. The river lay before us like a lake. The sun was warm on the long planks. There was not a flake of cloud in the sky.

Hour after hour passed, and the steamer, that had been detained in the fog of the preceding night, did not appear. We got into a drowsy and dreamy state. We watched the people come and go by the other boats, without interest or curiosity. Who were these, for example, this motley group of Indians, with their pale olive complexion, and their oval eyes like the eyes of the Chinese ? They spoke a guttural French ; and they were clad in rags and tatters of all colours. Hop

pickers? The squalid descendants of the old Iroquois? And when these had gone, the only man who did remain was a big sailor-looking person, who walked up and down and eagerly whittled a bit of wood. Him we did regard with some languid interest. For hitherto we had not seen any one engaged in this occupation; and we wished to know the object of it. Surely this was no idle amusement, this fierce and energetic cutting down of the stick? Was he not bent on making a peg? Or in sharpening his knife? Suddenly he threw a bit of wood into the river; and shut up his knife, with an air of much satisfaction: the mystery remains a mystery until this day.

Perhaps it is to beguile this tedium of waiting—and be it remembered that the Lake of a Thousand Islands lay right ahead of us, and Niagara, too; while at Niagara we expected to get letters from England—that one of us begins to tell a story. It is a pathetic story. It is all about a bank-clerk who lived a long time ago in Camden-town, and who used to walk in every day to the City. One day as he was passing a small shop,

he saw in a corner of the window about half a dozen water-colour drawings in a somewhat dirty and dilapidated state ; and it occurred to him that, if he could get these cheap, he might have them fresh-mounted and framed, and then they would help to decorate a certain tiny house that he had his eye on for a particular reason. He bought the pictures for a few shillings ; and he very proudly carried them forthwith to a carver and gilder whose shop lay in his line of route to the City. He was to call for them on the following Monday. He called in at the appointed time ; and the carver and gilder seemed suddenly to recollect that he had forgotten the drawings ; they would be ready on the next Monday. The bank-clerk was in no great hurry—for the fact is, he and his sweetheart had quarrelled—and he somewhat listlessly called in on the next Monday. The drawings, however, were not yet ready. And so it came to pass that every Monday evening as he went home to his lodgings, the bank-clerk—with a sad indifference growing more and more apparent in his face—called in for the water-colours, and found that they were not in the

frames yet, and promised, without any anger in his voice, to call again. Years passed; and quite mechanically, on each Monday evening, the bank-clerk called in for the pictures, and just as mechanically he walked home without them to his lodgings. But these years had been dealing hardly with the bank-clerk. His sweetheart had proved faithless; and he no longer cared for anything that happened to him. He grew negligent about his dress; he became prematurely grey; he could not trust his memory in the fulfilment of his duties. And so in time they had to ask him to resign his situation in the bank; and he became a sort of messenger or hall-porter somewhere, with his clothes getting dingier and his hair whiter summer by summer and autumn by autumn. And at last he fell sick; and his wages were stopped; and he thought there was nothing for him to do now but to turn his face to the wall and die. But—said the narrator of this true story—would you believe it, one night the pictures came home! There was a noise on the little wooden stair—not the heavy tramp of the undertaker—but the uncertain footsteps of the

carver and gilder, who had himself grown a tottering, white-headed old man. And when he came into the room, he burst into tears at sight of the poor bank-clerk; but all the same he cried out, "Now, see what I have done for you! I have kept your pictures until they have become OLD MASTERS! I have been offered £300 a piece for them; you can have the money to-morrow." And the poor bank-clerk wept, too; and he got up, and shook his friend by the hand; he could scarcely express his gratitude. But what does he do now? Why, on the strength of the sum of money he got for his pictures he started a Bath-chair; and you may see him any day you like being wheeled along the broad walks in Regent's Park; and whenever he sees a young man with a beard, a velveteen coat, and unwashed hands, he imagines him to be an artist, and he stops and says to him, "I beg your pardon, sir; but don't be hard on the poor carver and gilder. He is only increasing the value of your pictures. It will all come right in time." This was the story of the poor bank-clerk.

The steamer! What business have we to be

thinking about Regent's Park, here on the banks of the broad St. Lawrence? We enter the great vessel, and have a passing look at its vast saloons, and rows of cabins, and rows of life-belts. We start away into the wide stream, and go swiftly cutting through the clear green water; while the wooded and rocky banks and the occasional clusters of white houses glide noiselessly back into the sunny haze of the east. Then the vague nerve has to be appeased; for it is a long time since we left the coffee-room at Dan's. When we go out on the high deck again, the afternoon is wearing on, and we are nearing that great widening of the river which is known as the Lake of a Thousand Islands.

But surely this is neither a river nor a lake that begins to disclose itself—stretching all across the western horizon, with innumerable islands, and grey rocks, and dark clusters of firs, and bold sweeps of silver where a current passes through the dark-green reflections of the trees. It is more like a submerged continent just reappearing above the surface of the sea; for as far as the eye can range there is nothing visible but this glassy plain

of water, with islands of every form and magnitude, wooded down to the edge of the current. It is impossible to say which is our channel, and which the shore of the mainland ; we are in a wilderness of water, and rock, and tree, in unceasing combinations, in perpetual, calm, dream-like beauty. And as we open up vista after vista of this strange world—seeing no sign of life, from horizon to horizon, but a few wild-duck that go whirring by—the rich colours in the west deepen ; the sun sinks red behind some flashing clouds of gold ; there is a wild glare of rose and yellow that just misses the water, but lights up the islands as if with fire ; one belt of pine in the west has become of a deep violet ; while all around the eastern sky there is a low-lying flush of pink. And then, after the sun has gone, behold ! there is a pale, clear, beautiful green all across the west : and that is barred with russet, purple, and orange ; and the shadows along the islands have grown dusky and solemn. It is a magical night. The pale, lambent twilight still fills the world, and is too strong for the stars—unless we are to regard as golden planets the distant lights of the lighthouses

that steadily burn above the rocks. There is a grey, metallic lustre on the surface of the lake, now ruffled by the cool winds of the night. And still we go gliding by these dark and silent islands, having the sharp yellow ray of a lighthouse now on this side and now on that ; and still there seems to be no end to this world of shadowy foliage, and rock, and gleaming water. Good night—good night—before the darkness comes down ! The Lake of a Thousand Islands has burned itself into our memory in flashes of rose-colour and gold.

What is this strange thing that awakens us in the early morning—a roaring and rushing noise outside, a swaying of the cabin that reminds us of “the rolling Forties” in mid-Atlantic, and sudden dashes of green water across the dripping glass of the port-hole ? We stagger up on deck, and lo ! there is nothing around us but driving skies and showers and hurrying masses of green water, that seem to have no boundary of mainland or island. We congregate in the forward part of the saloon, and survey this cheerless prospect ; our only object of interest being the rapid flight of some wild-fowl that scud by before

the wind. Have we drifted away, then, from the big, hot continent they call America, and floundered somehow into the Atlantic or Pacific? We are withdrawn from this outward spectacle by the pathetic complaints of a tall and lank Canadian, who has made friends with everybody, and is loudly discoursing—in a high, shrill, plaintive key—of his troubles, not the least of which is that he declares he will shortly be sea-sick if this plunging of the steamer continues. It appears that he came on board at some port or other about six in the morning, with his wife, who, an invalid, still remains in her cabin.

“Yes, sir. The landlord shet up at ’leven o’clock, and we didn’t know when the boat was comin’ ’long; and me and the old woman we had to go bamboozlin round moren hef the night; and that makes a man kiner clanjammery, you bet!”

He looked through the dripping winds with an uncomfortable air.

“There’s a pretty riley bit o’ sea on,” he remarked.

He became more and more serious, and a little pale.

“If this goes on,” said he, suddenly, “by Gosh, I’ll heave!”

So we considered it prudent to withdraw from the society of this frank and friendly person; and while the vessel went plunging on through the wild chaos of green and grey mists and vapours we busied ourselves in purchasing nick-nacks manufactured by the Canadian Indians, little dreaming that ere long we should be the guest of the red man in his wigwam in the Far West, and be enabled to negotiate for the purchase of articles deposited by the innocent children of the forest at a sort of extemporized pawnshop at the Agency. It was then that one of our number—her name shall not be mentioned, even though thousands of pounds be offered—made a joke. It was not an elaborate joke. But when she said something, in a very modest and sly way, about a Pawnee, we forgave her wickedness for the sake of the beautiful colour that for a second suffused her blushing face.

Even Lake Ontario, shoreless as it seemed when we went on deck in the morning, must end some time; and so it was that at length we came in

sight of its north-western boundaries, and of Toronto. By this time the weather had cleared up a bit ; and we landed with the best disposition in the world towards this great collection of business buildings and private dwellings all put down at right angles on the sandy plain adjoining the lake.

“ *Now* will you study the history, literature, and political situation of Canada ? ” asked the only serious member of this party, when we had reached the spacious and comfortable hotel which was an agreeable relief after being on board that fog-surrounded ship.

“ I will not,” is the plain answer.

“ What did you come to America for ? ”

If she had been honest, she would have confessed that one of her plans in coming to America was the familiar one of delivering a series of lectures—all at the head of one innocent young wife. But she says boldly—

“ To amuse myself.”

“ And you have no care for the ties which bind the mother-country to these immense colonies—you have no interest in their demands——”

“Not the slightest.”

“You would see them go without concern.”

“Yes. Are we not always giving them a civil hint to that effect?”

“It is nothing to you that the enterprise of your fellow-subjects has built this great town, in a surprisingly short time, on this arid plain——”

“It is a great deal to me,” she says. “I must buy a dust-coat, if I can get one. And what about the arid plain! I see as many trees here as I have seen in any city on this side of the Atlantic.”

And so it was always; the most earnest of students would have broken down in his efforts to impress on this tourist party the necessity of learning anything. If you spoke to them about theatres, or carriages, or dry champagne, perhaps they might condescend to listen; but they treated with absolute indifference the most vital questions regarding the welfare of the nation whose guests they were. The kindly folks who drove them about Toronto—through the busy streets of the commercial district—through the sandy thoroughfares where the smart villas stood amid the

gardens—and through that broad and pleasant public park—tried to awaken their concern about the doings of this person and that person whose name was in all the newspapers; and they paid no more heed than they might have done had the Legislature at Ottawa been composed of the three tailors of Tooley Street. But there was one point about Toronto which they did most honestly and warmly admire; and that was the Norman Gothic University. To tell the truth, we had not seen much that was striking in the way of architecture since crossing the Atlantic; but the simple grace and beauty of this grey stone building wholly charmed these careless travellers; and again and again they spoke of it in after days when our eyes could find nothing to rest upon but tawdry brick and discoloured wood. There is a high tower at this Toronto College; and we thought we might as well go up the top of it. The lieutenant, who was never at a loss for want of an introduction, speedily procured us a key; and we began to explore many curious and puzzling labyrinths and secret passages. At last we stood on the flat top of the

square tower; and all around us lay a fresh and smiling country, with the broad waters of Ontario coming close up to the busy town. We went walking quite carelessly about this small enclosed place; we were chatting with each other; and occasionally leaning on the parapet of grey stone.

Who was it who first called out? Far away over there—in the haze of the sunlight—over the pale ridges of high-lying woods—a faint white column rose into the still sky, and spread itself abroad like a cloud. Motionless, colourless, it hung there in the golden air; and for a time we could not make out what this strange thing might be. And then we bethought ourselves—that spectral column of white smoke, rising into the summer sky, told where Niagara lay hidden in the distant woods.

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